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**Looking from the inside out: Reflecting on  
teacher agency within a performative context**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
the Manchester Metropolitan University for the degree of  
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## Abstract

Since the introduction of 1988 Education Act, the education system has seen major changes which continued to focus on policy and create a prescriptive performative culture among teachers. It was at this point that control within the classroom was perceived as ebbing away from the class teacher and moving more towards government and the rigours of policy

There has been a drive for transparency which has meant an increase in the amount of data schools and teachers must produce about their pupils and this data is used to judge both the worth of the teacher and the school. Pupil achievement forms part of performance management meetings and now determines pay scales for teachers in the state education system.

Critics of the education system have noted a rise in teachers leaving the profession and allude to a sense of teachers having to conform to policy in order to be deemed 'good' at their job. In recent years, stress and the mental health of teachers has been a widely discussed topic in the media, and it has been reported that the pressures of performativity are widely to blame.

This thesis explores the impact of policy on teacher agency through interviews with four teachers at different stages in their professional careers, and also through my own experiences and reflective writing, in the context of a performative culture. It focuses on their narratives and my own, through the lens of Peshkin and his work relating to subjectivity and 'Situational Identity'. It questions how and where teachers experience professional agency and the affect policy has on the assertion of agency and the development of their pedagogy.

The analysis suggests that although policy causes tensions and contradictions with teachers' values and preferred pedagogy, values still lie at the heart of what teachers do and they are not lost amongst the plethora of policy and paperwork. There may be times when their practice is not carried out in the way they had intended, but times of great tension can also elicit a stronger assertion of agency; difficult decisions can be made that focus on what is right for their pupils, and complicit conformation is not the only option. Agency lies within the tensions and contradictions certain contexts create and it is in the management of these tensions that agency becomes apparent.

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family, especially my children, George and Felicity, who have missed out on much of my time during the writing of the thesis.



## Chapter 1 – Introduction: Developing an Insider View

### Background to this thesis

When I was growing up, the one profession I always said I would never pursue was teaching. It was only after experiencing other professions that I found them to prove relatively meaningless, and after a few voluntary sessions in a local school I found myself applying for a PGCE. My research journey began not long afterwards, and in my NQT year I found myself in a highly prescriptive school. Fortunately, I had begun studying for a Master's in Teaching; for me, this course allowed an outlet for the frustrations and restrictions put upon me. I found that my action learning set discussions were extremely supportive and they enabled me to see that the situation I was in was not the norm, even for an NQT. My writing for the course became a form of therapy and was often concerned with emotive issues that I felt affected my pedagogy and the way in which I viewed my role as a teacher. As part of my Master's I was required to keep journal entries to inform written assignments and discussions. I noticed that I tended to write about my emotional responses and the issues that triggered these responses became a focus for my writing. I wrote a lot about power and identity in an attempt to reflect upon and understand the experiences that I was going through. Reflection allowed me a certain sense of understanding of my situation, but in addition, I began to read a lot of Ball's work (1998, 2003, 2008); I could see a lot of myself in the teachers that he depicted, and I found comfort in the feeling that I was not alone.

A year after completing my Master's I felt a sense of emptiness with regards to my own education. I had completed a degree, a PGCE and a Master's, and had been used to educating myself as well as others; I missed the opportunity it gave me for reflection and the perspective it gave me on my context and my actions within it. I enrolled on the Doctor of Education Course, and began my studies in September 2010. During this time, my school context altered; I had moved on from my prescriptive NQT placement and took up my second post in a school which initially afforded me with a lot more pedagogical freedom. At the time of beginning the Doctorate, more aspects of Ofsted criteria crept into school life; I was beginning to feel restricted again and I felt as though my pedagogy was being ruled by measurable data. Once again, as part of the

requirement of the course, I kept journal entries which gave me an outlet for my frustrations, and enabled me to discuss my situation with my Doctoral action learning set. The extent of the pressure at my second school was so great that, on the first day of my maternity leave, I told my husband that I could not return to that school.

We relocated to be closer to family and I got a job in a private school close to where I grew up. The difference was incomparable; in the early days I would sometimes find myself sat at my desk during a free lesson, planning done, marking done, unsure of how to fill the time. I found that I did not need to write such emotive reflections because the frustration and restrictions had been removed; it was the first time I felt that I had true ownership over my practice as a teacher. I had a sense of freedom and was encouraged to be creative and to offer new ideas, I was free to assert my own agency. This made me question why my new school setting felt so different, and why what I was experiencing in my third post could not be experienced by my colleagues in the state system. Although I was thoroughly enjoying my new-found freedom, it still troubled me that this was not considered the norm. I began to question where agency could be found in the state system and if teachers were able to be somehow autonomous in the classroom. I returned to Ball's (1998, 2003, 2008) work again and reflected on my experience as a teacher and his depiction of teachers working within a prescriptive, performative education system. Within my own career I had felt pressured and oppressed but working in a school with more freedom allowed me to work in the way I had originally intended. I began to reflect on Ball's work and found myself questioning his notions on the forced abandonment of teachers' identities. I did not feel as though that my identity had been completely lost in my prescriptive contexts, but it had been displaced over time when factors such as performativity and prescriptive environments had taken over. Was this the case for others? Was Ball's bleak depiction of teacher autonomy what teachers were experiencing, or was there more room for manoeuvrability than at first glance? Were teachers able to maintain a sense of ownership over their practice, and if so, how did they manage to assert their agency?

## Overview of the thesis

With questions about agency and teacher identity in mind, Chapter 2 begins by focusing on Ball's (1998, 2003, 2008, 2011a, 2011b, 2013) work on education policy and how this impacts on a teacher's sense of identity. I review the English education policy context in terms of the effect that reforms since the late 1980s have had on teachers and their practice. Ball's work depicts how policy has gradually transformed a teacher's job from one based on judgement and creativity, to one which must be compliant within a performativity driven system. He discusses how the discourse of teaching has altered and how teachers have now become swept up in the new rhetoric and the quest for data, pressurising schools to become 'more like business' (Ball, 2008:18). Ball suggests that new identities are formed as a result of educational reforms and I explore this idea in more detail.

At the end of Chapter 2 I explore Ball's depiction of teachers, questioning his (2003) description of two teachers, Chloe and Diane, as giving up both their sense of teaching identity and their purpose in being a teacher. I argue that Ball's observations are made from the point of view of an outsider, and I begin to reflect on my own time as a teacher like Chloe or Diane; as an insider, I question if this is a true reflection of myself as a teacher, or whether in fact there was more room for manoeuvrability than I had considered, both at the time, and since. I ask the overall question: are teachers able to maintain a sense of ownership over their practice despite the demands of performativity, and if so, how do they manage to assert their agency? This leads me to the formation of my research questions:

1. What is the nature of teacher agency in a performative context: to what extent do teachers experience their work as agentic and what role does this play in their sense of self as a teacher?
2. Where does agency lie within decision making? How are decisions made and what choices do teachers feel they have? How do those choices relate to the overall school context?
3. Are there particular acts or values that have significance?

Thus, the general approach of my thesis is "from the inside looking out". In Chapter 3, I explore the methodological and theoretical implications of this viewpoint, in terms of

how I could take into account my own subjectivity, looking at how my beliefs and values might shape and govern my research. I turn to Peshkin's (1984, 1988a, 1988b, 2000) work on conducting qualitative research and the importance of exploring one's own subjectivity as a researcher, and how it intertwines within the research itself. Peshkin notes the importance of interpretation and its relationship with the researcher's own experience and epistemology. I examine his work on subjectivity (1988a) and use his methods to explore my own, identifying a set of 'Situational I's' that different school contexts have elicited. I recognise that each 'Situational I' is pervaded by an 'Historical I' which affects how I relate and react to each new context. I explore how this approach provides a lens through which I can view not only my journal entries, but also a number of interviews with other teachers. Peshkin encourages the researcher to continually reflect upon the self and how the 'self, or identity in a situation, intertwines with his or her understanding of the object of the investigation' (Peshkin, 2000:5).

Chapter 3 also details the methods I used to conduct my research. I describe the circumstances of my journal entries and their role in my research journey, beginning during my Master's and continuing to inform my study during the Doctorate course. I describe how I analysed the journal entries as a source of rich data as an insider, enabling me to reflect on the 'Situational I's' and how different contexts shaped and informed my practice and understanding. I address the challenges and affordances of insider research and the ethical dilemmas that it entails. I detail how and why I conducted the interviews, and the selection of interviewees. I discuss the details of the construction and approach to interviews as well as the analysis process and the ethical considerations. The journal entries and analysis are not analysed independently of each other; the journal entries provide an inside view which was then viewed as an outsider through Peshkin's lens. The 'Situational I's' enabled new insights and coloured my reflections on the interviews. I then returned to the journal entries and was able to examine my perspective, at the time, more closely. My subjectivity became a key part of my analysis, informing my thesis and giving a lens by which to explore other data.

Chapter 4 presents the data, intertwining the analysis of the journal entries and the interview data to show how other's perspective provided by the interviews reframes my understanding of my own perceptions as a teacher. Throughout the chapter, my initial

analysis of the journal entries informs the exploration of the interviews. I explore how my informants expressed their agency as teachers in particular contexts, drawing conclusions regarding the loss of a sense of self, as Ball (2003) depicts, versus the maintenance of values and beliefs in accordance with Peshkin's concept of the 'Historical I'. After which, I return to the journal entries once more, examining them through a lens of new understanding and perceptions afforded by the interviews. I explore why I perceived events similarly or differently to others, leading to conclusions about the nature of perception and how it changes over time.

In Chapter 5 I return more specifically to my 'Situational Identities' to explore where agency lies within certain contexts. As with the journal entries in Chapter 4, I look from the inside, at myself and my 'Situational I's', out to the interviews, examining the situations or contexts that allow for agency and what that looks like. I explore what it was within each of these 'Situational I's' that affords a sense of agency and what makes one context more agentic than another. I question whether there is space for a teacher's values to marry with their pedagogy and practice, and whether it is possible to feel a sense of ownership within the classroom. I inquire whether some contexts mean those values are completely lost, as Ball (2003) suggests, or whether, as an insider, I have uncovered more opportunity for agency than he, and my NQT self, had initially allowed. At the end of the chapter I return to my research questions and discuss what my research has led me to understand about where agency lies.

Chapter 6 summarises the thesis, returning to Ball to compare my insider research findings with his outsider conclusions. While I maintain the significance of Ball's work, my different perspective leads me to different conclusions. I discuss the use of Peshkin's methodology as a valuable tool for researchers and chart the role of his methods in enabling a different perspective in this research. Subjectivity is not simply discussed in this thesis; rather, it is used to illuminate thinking and provide opportunity for the exploration of perception. I conclude by suggesting opportunities for further study and the implications for others, reflecting on the journey that this thesis has taken me on and how I have a new understanding of myself. I started the journey by wanting to understand others and answer questions for those that are still struggling with performativity; the result of this thesis is an insider's journey, detailing how an

examination of subjectivity which is used to shift perspective from inside to outside can shift and change ways of thinking. New perspectives can be achieved, resulting in a deeper level of understanding and alternative ways of viewing future situations.

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review: Ball and the Terrors of Performativity

### Education Reform, the National Curriculum and Market Forces

In this section I briefly review English education policy as a backdrop to a discussion of Ball's (1998, 2003, 2008, 2011a, 2011b, 2013) work on policy impact on teachers' agency and professional identities. The aim of this thesis is to explore the effect of such reforms on teachers, their practice and identities, and to examine closely Ball's substantial and influential research into the impact of education policy and the actors and subjects within the field. Throughout his work, Ball has offered a critical perspective on educational policy and its influences within different contexts, using policy sociology as a methodology. Policy, in this sense, is not merely seen as just a text, and Ball examines the context and actors which have led to the development of the document and explores the micro context of its influences.

The 1988 Education Act in England and Wales was seen by many as a move 'to bring Education into the market place' (Tomlinson, 1989:276). It was a hugely significant act, seeing the relinquishing of power from the school and teacher, to central government (Woods and Jeffrey, 1996). Critics at the time, such as Deem, viewed the Act as 'crucially concerned with control' (Deem, 1988:187): choice was being removed from individual schools and Local Education Authorities while the marketisation of education supposedly empowered parents and school governors (Ball, 1993). This Act is a crucial example of the way in which policy and reform can call the autonomy of teachers into question, removing trust in their pedagogic and curricular choices (Gorard et al., 2002). Concerns were raised about a withdrawal of power from those previously viewed as experts in education, to those with neoliberal views and less knowledge about the realities of pedagogy and day to day teaching (Deem, 1988). Addressing the 1988 Education Act, Ball (2008) notes 'six key elements of neoliberal and neoconservative advocacy around education policy':

1. The implementation of a National Curriculum
2. National Testing
3. Teacher evaluation and assessment providing 'market information' for parents

4. Parental 'choice' to express a preference for a state school
5. Schools controlling budgets as opposed to LEAs

Previously school budgets were in the control of the Local Education Authority (LEA). This Act saw the movement of control away from LEAs and budgets given to schools to manage. This may appear contradictory after noting Deem's concerns that power was being withdrawn from schools, however, it must be noted that the establishment of a National Curriculum and the centralisation of control to The Secretary of State for Education meant that accountability measures could also be put into place. The marketisation of education meant that although schools appeared in control of their budgets, they were also now viewed as a commodity and had to compete for their place and value in the market with other schools. Such a system did not consider the locality of a school or economic and social disparity between areas. This meant that often the failing schools were in areas of high deprivation and faced issues that were not visible within the market model.

6. Increase in responsibility of head teachers and governors. (2008:80)

A common curriculum was created for pupils between the ages of 5 and 16. This was the first major movement in the withdrawal of teacher control in the classroom and was met with opposition from those within the education system. In 'The Education Debate' (2008), Ball documents the history of education with an emphasis on the way in which education policy has transitioned to being out-sourced to both private and public organisations, with the focus being on business and production; by this he is referring to 'knowledge economy' (Ball, 2008). With such significant advancements in technology, Ball identifies that 'wealth-creating work' has changed from being 'physically based to knowledge based' (Ball, 2008:19). He argues that globalisation plays a major part in modern education reform; such knowledge can be shared with a global workforce at the touch of a button day or night, thus creating a new discourse in the form of 'policy technologies' (Ball, 2008:42). These are an essential element in the formation of new teacher identities and a form of regulation, created in order to supervise and manage large groups of people into 'functioning systems' (Ball, 2008). These technologies are broken down into three sections moving from the macro to micro contexts: market,



management and performance, and are much more than just a form of organisation; they also create a 'one size fits all model' (2008:42) which does not take into account the complexities of the pupil's being taught or varying school contexts and are 'deployed across the public sector as a whole' (2008:42). Ball argues that it is not only new discourse that evolves among the actors and subjects of policy, but also new identities:

They provide a new language, a new set of incentives and disciplines and a new set of roles, positions and identities within which what it means to be a teacher, student/learner, parent and so on are all changed. (2008:42)

An example of this is the implementation of grading a pupil's writing using levels. In the classroom this creates a discourse between the teacher and student based on the level of the child, 'you are a 2b, you need to do x,y and z to move up to a 2a.' In terms of writing, the child has a new identity, a 2b, which is then used in discussions with that child and possibly other members of staff when discussing pupil progress. In addition to labelling the child (Reay and William, 1999), this discourse also transfers into management level when discussing a teacher's performance. The teacher is judged and a value placed upon them with regards to the levels that the pupils have achieved, thus creating a new focus and discourse during management meetings (Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016). Ball's analysis of policy as 'providing' new discourse and practice highlights the way in which policy can embed itself within the school context (Sikes, 2001). Critics have viewed this policy driven education system as replacing professional judgement of teachers with conformity, control and regulation (Jeffrey and Woods, 1998). As schools were, until recently, judged on the progress pupils had made in terms of levels, Department of Education numeracy and literacy strategies guidelines stipulated that levels should be used to chart a child's progress, subsequently demonstrating the worth of the teacher. Ball's work recognises that the cycle of policies creates change for teachers, some more than others. Teachers are not always privy to the formation of such changes, however, and their view of themselves, their pedagogy and practice can be notably altered as a result. This is described in Ball's (2008) response to the introduction of the national curriculum:

Targets, accountability, competition and choice, leadership, entrepreneurship, performance related pay and privatisation articulate new ways of thinking about

what we do, what we value and what our purposes are. They work together to render education as like a commodity rather than a public good. (2008:43)

The curriculum also changed. Ball (2008) argued that the Conservatives regarded the inner-city schools as counter to 'certain fixed core values' (2008:82), prompting a 'restorationist' agenda (2008) to reassert their morality through curriculum reform. The 'new language' provided via this new curriculum rewrote the dialogue within the classroom; the teacher had new academic discourse to impart to the children. For example, Britain was portrayed in the history curriculum as a 'benign and progressive influence on the world' (2008:82), and children were to learn about Britain's heritage and morality, a celebration of Victorian accomplishments (Ball, 2008). There was also a drive for schools to recognise the requirements of future employers and 'to steer young people to the boom spheres of business and industry' (2008:83). This rearticulating of what was to be taught led some to feel that 'a process of deskilling was taking place' (Mac an Ghaill, 1992:181). The teacher was removed from the creation process of the classroom discourse (Smyth, 2001). Mac an Ghaill's research into the impact of policies on teachers noted the contradictory nature of the intention of policy versus the reality. An example of this was the introduction of cross-curricular themes alongside the National Curriculum: the themes of 'Economic and Industrial Awareness', 'Careers Education', 'Health Education', 'Education for Citizenship' and 'Environmental Education' were described by Ball and Bowe as that which 'the new Government-nominated National Curriculum Council (NCC) deems to be 'essential parts' of the whole curriculum' (Ball and Bowe, 1992:97). This move was intended to increase communication between teachers, yet in Mac an Ghaill's case study, teachers 'had less time to meet, which increased the existing low morale which in turn served further to isolate teachers' (1992:190). He also noted a culture change within schools: heads of department who had previously been in control of the curriculum within their schools found themselves second to a new, in-house team of curriculum coordinators. This, in turn, led to a new 'axis of power relations' (1992:181) and challenged teacher's 'professional autonomy' (1992:181). It was not simply the discourse that was changing, but how the discourse was being conducted. Teachers who had a certain amount of authority over their department or subject were somewhat diminished by the new curriculum; it was no

longer their choice. Woods argued that the move to a more prescriptive education system left teachers with 'less scope for experimentation', resulting in the delivery of lessons designed to suit a framework rather than 'stimulate children's interest in imagination' (1993:358). Among critics, the curriculum was commonly seen as a shift in power and an assertion of political control over education. Tomlinson and Campbell (1987) stated that the

incorporation of teacher appraisal into the 1986 Education Act, the imposition of new conditions of service and pay upon teachers, the possible removal of the right to strike for teachers, the establishment of a national curriculum are all of a piece; they reflect an urgent slide into authoritarian forms of government. (1987:375)

Mac an Ghaill (1992) argued that the removal of the responsibility for deciding what was to be taught demoted practitioners from 'the status of teachers to that of facilitators' which 'further undermine[d] and devalue[d] their work' (1992:181). Such arguments chart a huge change in the working identities of teachers and highlights the concern among practitioners, in Mac an Ghaill's case, about how their autonomy may be diminished.

Tomlinson (1989) notes that another key feature of the application of market forces was the introduction of parental 'choice' with schools ensuring 'goods [are] on offer so as to make choice apparent' (1989:276). Schools were put in competition with each other, competing for pupil numbers which would increase their funding. Questioning the 'formation and expression of parental voice in schools' Vincent and Martin (1999) researched the reality of parental voice and how the voice is in effect managed and responded to by schools (Gerwitz, Ball and Bowe, 1993). They observed that in a market forces culture, 'neo-liberalism has sought to turn the public domain into a market in which an atomised public exercise competitive consumer choice' (1999:132). In their research parental voice and its impact was dependent on the context of the school and an 'individualistic mechanism' (1999:142), meaning it was up to the school how they responded to parental voice and in some cases it was heavily managed. Practising their right to leave or choose another school played a much larger part in market consumerism than parental 'voice' (1999:142). How well they exercised their consumer

choice, however, was dependent on a variety of social factors. Ball (2008) argued that 'the use of choice and voice mechanisms both under the Conservatives and New Labour have been confusing and contradictory' (2008:132). The contradictory nature was largely because the process of choosing a school and having a first choice accepted were two markedly different points (Gerwitz, Ball and Bowe, 1995). Burgess et al.'s research (2006) suggested that there was a choice of schools; within urban areas, pupils were in close proximity to at least three schools. The 'apparent' choice given to parents, however, was dependent on their cultural capital: 'the middle classes can use their social and cultural skills and capital advantages to good effect' (Ball, 2008:133). More affluent families had the means to travel further for schooling, to afford housing in areas with 'good' or 'outstanding' schools and the knowledge and even possible connections to endeavour to steer the choices in their favour (Whitty, Power and Haplin, 1997).

Although there was the appearance of 'choice', Ball is clear in his argument that this choice is not straightforward, leading to even further segregation between social classes (Taylor, 2001). To demonstrate this, Ball (2008) draws on research from Burgess et al. (2006), who conducted research into 'school choice' in order to supply clear facts and data concerning choice of schools for those considering the issue. It was found that poorer families endeavour to follow the same strategies as the middle class 'but they achieve this outcome to a much lesser extent' (Burgess et al., 2006). This was often due to location and population density. They discovered that families who lived in areas of high deprivation in urban areas had a choice of at least three schools, but catchment areas for the higher achieving schools would cover a smaller area and places would be highly sought after and limited (Reay and Lucey, 2000). House prices in such areas would be unobtainable for poorer families and their choice restricted to lower performing schools in the area. It was noted that a pupil who qualified for free school meals was 30 percent more likely attend a low scoring school. These statistics also highlight the issue that the movement of some away from local schools is not always due to 'consumer choice' (Burgess et al, 2006). If places are filled at a school due to the choice parents have made, this has an effect on others, meaning some parents have to send their children to a school they had not chosen (Burgess et al, 2006). Ball and Vincent's (1998) paper explores the complexities of school choice in relation to the concept of 'grapevine

knowledge' embedded in social networks and localities (1998:377). Grapevine knowledge is the unofficial knowledge passed on to parents in social networks, 'hot' knowledge as opposed to 'cold' knowledge of official school data and published reports (Ball and Vincent, 1998). Echoing the notion that parental voice leads to further segregation in social classes, Ball and Vincent argue that grapevine knowledge

provides information, however flawed, and it provides a medium of social comparison—with others 'like us' and 'others' not 'like us'. Viewed in this way we can begin to see how choice of school is being subsumed within general class-related strategies of consumption. (Ball and Vincent, 1998:393)

Ball (2008:84) notes that 'further shifts and ruptures' were signalled with the advent of New Labour's control and the re-articulation of Labour Party principles. The aforementioned Conservative reforms produced opportunities for additional changes by 'softening up or weakening the embedded assumptions of the welfare model of education and public service' (Ball, 2008:104). The shift from Old to New Labour focussed on a move from industrial economy to that of an 'informational and service economy' (Ball, 2008:84). It was regarded as a time of 'new managerialism' (Hartley, 1997) taking the role of consumer and provider within education to another level.

A key factor of new managerialism was the focus on a measurable and accountable society, allowing consumers transparent data to compare and judge organisations (Morley and Rassool, 2000). According to Hartley (1997), the justification for such regulation was based on 'efficiency and global competition' (1997:49). This is a view that Ball supports: 'the market form, constitutes a *new moral environment* for both consumers and producers, that is a form of 'commercial civilisation' (Ball, 2008:45). Many regarded Conservative reforms and New Labour's subsequent quest for transparent educational management as 'a coercive, top-down, compliance driven system' (Barker, 2008:674), demonstrated by the increased autonomy given to head teachers and governors, to encourage managers to focus on attainment and results (Ball, 2008). Although it appeared that schools were being given more autonomy, Ball argues that this marked the beginning of the new managerial discourse, a competitive market which encouraged those within it to 'want what the system needs in order to perform well' (2008:46). An example of this is a teacher's desire to be graded highly

during a lesson observation offering 'the possibility of a triumphant self of becoming a new kind of professional' (Ball, 2003:218). As noted with the national curriculum, new discourse works its way into normal school life. Thus, boundaries are redefined (Ball, 2008) as 'public sector institutions [become] more 'businesslike' and 'more like business'' (Ball, 2008:18) and the private sector is assured of 'an increasing role in the management and delivery of public services' (Ball, 2008:18). The teacher's role in this sense was to deliver the grades. New identities are formed within educational reforms. Accompanying the new policies comes new labels and the discourses with which to use them; teachers affiliate themselves with the type of teacher Ofsted criteria deems them to be and such vocabulary is prevalent in appraisals. Professional development courses are created and named after gradings, 'good to outstanding' and 'satisfactory to good' demonstrating the powerful nature of policy and the way in which its language feeds into the school context. Ball's analysis of the market form depicts education as a commodity to be sold and as a competitive device. Competition and comparison arises among staff who judge themselves and others by the new terminology. New values are established in line with new management; teachers who have set aside their values aspire to be recognised and deemed valuable within the new market to meet the newly introduced productivity targets (Ball, 2008). Within the judgement and comparison against new criteria, questions arise about how new values and accountability systems impact on a teacher's identity and practice. It is necessary to understand whether they react to such changes and whether changes alter them and their pedagogy indefinitely, or merely alter for a time before the next policy emerges.

#### [Data requirements and the impact on pedagogy](#)

The introduction of benchmark tests to accompany the new curriculum introduced through the 1988 Education Reform Act prompted concern about how such tests were to be administered and what use they would serve. As Murphy commented the year before:

Trying to understand what the purpose of the benchmark tests will be, is probably as great a challenge as will face those who at a later stage will attempt to construct and administer them. (Murphy, 1987:318)

Murphy's (1987) assessment of the national curriculum expressed unease that the assessment system would become 'totally external and divorced from what goes on in schools' (1987:319). These concerns were not unwarranted. Ball notes further moves of control ebbing away from schools in the education reforms of 1980s and 90s saw the gradual enactment of privatising areas of the public sector (Ball, 2008). An example is the introduction of City Technology Colleges (CTC). The modern-day equivalent of academies, they had links to businesses and more of a vocational nature. They generally specialised in a particular field and did not come under the rule of an LEA; rather, local businesses were responsible for financing them (Ball, 2008). One of the most significant privatisations was the formation of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in 1992. It replaced Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) who the Conservatives 'regarded with suspicion' (Ball, 2008:78).

Privatisation of school inspection and the publishing of standardised results paved the way for New Labour to introduce an accountable education system (Page, 2017). The third section of the 1998 White Paper was dedicated to 'Standards and Accountability'. Pledging higher standards in schools, New Labour could maintain surveillance over the education reforms using mechanisms which required the collection of evidential data. Ball viewed the implementation of national testing and league tables as 'another moment in the shifting powers between teachers and the centre' (2008:112). The progress of a child was publicised, and in doing so the surveillance was placed upon the teacher and data dictated their worth. Also critical of the way in which such data was used to judge and undermine teachers' professional judgement was Ozga, whose 2009 paper notes that the 'reform of Education in England, [is] linked to the creation of depersonalised judgement and increasingly driven by apparently objective data' (Ozga, 2009:153). Performativity and the drive for data saw the education system taking a further step towards the business world. As stated by Lumby, drawing on the work of Bauman and Goffman, data became a requirement to illustrate worth and value to consumers as well as teachers' own self-worth:

it is a performance where what is constructed is part of an individual's accumulation and defence of self-worth and status in the perception of others (Bauman 2004; Goffman 1959). (Lumby, 2009:355)

Ball addressed accountability in his 2003 paper 'The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity' in which he critiques the performative nature of the education system and assesses the effect such a system has on a teacher. Jeffrey (2002) notes that prior to performative discourse, the education system was 'a humanist one based on a set of values centred around holism, person-centeredness' (2002:532). Far removed from such relationship-based culture, Ball refers to performativity as 'a technology, a culture and mode of regulation' (2003:216); both the teacher and the school are performers who are to be measured by their output in terms of academic data (Ball, 2003). The focus of the paper moves away from discussing policy context, in terms of regime and surveillance, instead deliberating on the effect of such policy on the individual. Ball addresses the notion that reform changes have the capacity to 'bring about change in our subjective existence and our relation with one another' (2003:217). Within this new system, teachers and their individuality, in the sense of accountability, is heightened. They are not regarded as a collective body of the school; rather, they are monitored individually and put under pressure to display their worth by achieving new targets. The display of their worth can also be a relatively public affair; staff meetings in my previous schools have involved examining pupil progress, thus allowing comparison and competition between staff members and possibly intensifying feelings of insecurity. Ball also questions the value and acceptance of new identities 'required' by policy. The metaphor of an 'unstoppable flood' of policy creates a sense of instability and uncertainty that pervades his portrayal of teachers and the dichotomy between their beliefs and new practice. Ball refers to such a struggle as 'values schizophrenia' (2003:221), arguing that within new roles, responsibilities and accountability, the teacher's identity is reworked: the 'new vocabulary of performance renders old ways of thinking and relating dated or redundant or even obstructive' (2003:218). An example of this would be grouping children together by an acronym, such as 'SEN' (special educational needs), or referencing a child by his/her level of assessment, for example 3a, rather than by his/her name. Similarly, teachers measure themselves by their own success criteria, desiring to 'be outstanding, successful, above average' (Ball, 2003:219). The engagement within the market discourse creates a desire to be recognised within it and there is a certain 'satisfaction to be gained from the achievement of goals and improvement in performance' (Jeffrey, 2002:532).



Ball argues that the difficulty in being part of a performative education system is 'the flow of changing demands, expectations and indicators' (2003:220). The instability of such changes and the constant moving of the goalposts leaves teachers 'unsure of what aspects of work are valued and how to prioritize efforts' (Ball, 2003:220). A hypothetical example of this would be the drive to improve boys' writing. In a pupil progress meeting a teacher is asked to identify boys to focus on in terms of accelerating their learning. There is a mixed group of children in the class who could benefit from writing intervention, but the focus is just on boys and that is what the teacher is being judged on. The teacher must prioritise what is being valued, and in this case the boys' writing will be the measure of her achievements even if she feels this is not what she wants. Ball gives an example of Diane, a teacher who is in the midst of an inspection (Ball, 2003). Diane is depicted as another self, removed from her usual teaching identity: 'the teacher that is inspected here is not Diane. It is someone that Diane knows the inspectors want to see' (2003:222). This calls Diane's identity into question, but it also calls into question how quickly new teaching identities can be formed and discarded. If Diane became another version of her teaching self, for the length of time the inspectors were visiting, this suggests that teaching identities are fluid and dependent on various forms of surveillance, the most extreme being an inspection observation. Ball (2003) argues that the 'ontological dilemmas' that are faced by teachers causes an 'alienation of the self' (2003:222); no longer can the teacher be the judge of their own pedagogy or practice, instead they must adhere to the modes of regulation, targets that conform to producing measurable outputs (Ball, 2003). The loss of values accompanies the loss of beliefs: 'beliefs are no longer important - it is output that counts' (Ball, 2003:223). However, Ball recognises that teachers do not willingly part with their values and beliefs; the path of performativity is not without its tensions and contradictions:

On the one hand, teachers are concerned that what they do will not be captured by or valued within the metrics of accountability and, on the other, that these metrics will distort their practice. Alongside this is a further tension, between metric performances and authentic and purposeful relationships.' (Ball, 2003:223)

Ball thus focuses on how an education system governed by performativity filters into the teacher's relationships and pedagogy. Jeffrey's (2002) research found that the pressures of inspection and targets meant the teacher's 'caring, nurturing role was restructured into caring predominantly for pupil performance' (2002:354). Similarly, Ball cites a problematic instance with a special needs teacher. In a performative culture, the desire is for 'good' results; children with special educational needs are less likely to provide such results which could mean that performance managers request that investment is given to other children (Ball, 2003). Ball's concern is not that performativity obstructs learning (Ball, 2003); rather it is the way in which it alters relationships such that 'the relationships between learners, are desocialized' (2003:226). Not only are the teacher/pupil relationships at risk, but also those between the staff, where 'there is evidence of increased, sometimes intentional, competition between teachers and departments' (Ball, 2003:52).

### Inspection and performative processes

An influential educational and performative process is school inspection, which is currently conducted by Ofsted. Perryman (2006; 2009) explores the issues of performing for an inspection in relation to Foucault's panopticon. Perryman explains the phrase 'panoptic performativity' as

a regime in which frequency of inspection and the sense of being perpetually under surveillance leads to teachers performing in ways dictated by the discourse of inspection in order to escape the regime. (Perryman, 2006:148)

Similarly, claims are made by Jeffrey (2002) and Ball (2003) that identity is not stable and that performativity can affect a teacher's practice. Perryman (2006; 2009) discusses the term 'normalization', used by Foucault when discussing Bentham's panopticon (Foucault, 1994), describing the supervisor of the panopticon as 'constituting a knowledge concerning those he supervised' (1994:59). An example of this in the education system would be the monitoring and observation that a member of senior management would undertake of teachers in their school. Data and open door policies allow surveillance of such teachers and affords the observer a certain amount of 'knowledge' over those they supervise. Knowledge could be interpreted as judgements as to whether the teacher was 'good' or 'outstanding' or if the teacher was ensuring the

children were making accelerated progress. This knowledge may be 'organized around the norm, in terms of what was normal or not, correct or not' (1994:59). In terms of inspection, it can be understood as 'the process by which schools operate within the expected norms of an 'effective school'' (2009:615). Here the knowledge includes targets and success criteria that schools are judged by. Perryman argues that a school no longer has the autonomy 'to "do their own thing" in terms of improvement' (2009:616). Similarly, Ball (2003) and Jeffrey (2002) suggest that performativity has taken away any room for experimentation. Performativity becomes the process by which a school's documentation and teacher's pedagogy is judged, the aim being to remain within the normalised gaze (Perryman, 2009). Foucault's panopticon afforded the prisoner no escape from surveillance, noting that 'everything the individual does is exposed to the gaze of an observer' (1994:58). Perryman acknowledges the watchful gaze but argues that such scrutiny means the inspectors 'do not see the real school' (2009:619). This echoes Ball's observations discussed earlier that Diane performs as someone she knows 'the inspectors want to see' (2003:222); the normal route of behaviour is to show conformity to standards, to demonstrate that predetermined criteria have been met (Perryman: 2009) but at the expense of 'the alienation of the self' (Ball, 2003:222).

Continuing from Perryman's (2006; 2009) use of Foucault, Ball (2013) refers to Foucault's argument that the 'pressures of a regime of numbers defines "a whole new field of realities" (Foucault, 2009:79)'. Ball argues that the reality of teaching and education is encompassed within a culture of education reform, prompting a sea of new and ever-changing policies where schooling 'is rendered into an input-output calculation' (2013:104). If policy x is followed then the results for pupils will be x, y and z, meaning the humanistic side of teaching is being overlooked by prescriptive and target driven policies which in turn affects the role and identity of the teacher. In a return to images of the panopticon's surveillance, Ball references Foucault's notion of 'disciplinary power' (1979) and its imposition:

[it] imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility...it is the fact of being constantly seen, of always being able to be seen, that maintains the disciplines subject in his subjections. (1979:187)

Ball argues that although the primary focus of the gaze is on the students and the data which they produce, teachers are inevitably drawn into this surveillance because they impart the knowledge by which the students are judged (Ball, 2013). He argues that such constant surveillance alters the nature of the student-teacher relationship (Ball, 2013): policy modifies what is acceptable in terms of performance such that 'this is refracted in changes of emphasis within schools to "focus" on and produce different sorts of students' (2013:108). A 'new reality' is created within the classroom of what must be aspired to and what should be achieved.

Ball appreciates that in this performative society a teacher's subjectivity should be explored to understand the effects on pedagogy and the teacher's self. He draws on Foucault's two meanings of the word "subject": 'subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self- knowledge' (Foucault, 1982:212). Ball realises the duality of subjectivity as 'the possibility of lived experience within a context – political and economic' (2013:125). The teacher brings her lived knowledge into the classroom, but must conform to behave within the parameters of performativity; 'the neo-liberal subject is malleable rather than committed' (Ball, 2013:139). The teacher must adapt and conform to new policies in order to achieve new targets, and this is monitored through a variety of methods such as observations, pupil progress meetings and analysis of class data. Thus, there is a question that surrounds how committed a teacher may be to their own pedagogy and practice, and how much they are moulded by policy. Teaching practice is depicted as rigid and impersonal, and the teacher is portrayed as relatively weak as she is subjected to constant surveillance and ensconced within a data driven society. Ball does, however, employ Foucault's later work to view the application of power and formation of subjectivity differently to his earlier work: 'the idea of subjectivity as what we do, rather than who we are, as an active process of becoming' (2013:125). This notion allows the teacher more agency than Ball has previously assumed. To achieve a greater sense of freedom, 'the task is to produce ourselves, to experiment, to make ourselves through practices of care' (Ball, 2013:147). Thinking needs to be rethought, freedom in this sense is the relationship we have with ourselves: what restrictions do we choose to put on ourselves when faced with changes? Is the policy in control of what teachers do or can they respond in a way that still reflects

who they are as a teacher? What Ball has highlighted is that there is the possibility of manoeuvrability within a performative society. What still appears problematic, though, is the way in which teachers may achieve this sense of freedom. As with the example of Diane, the feelings of pressure to perform, deskilling and ontological dilemmas affords little room for a teacher's thoughts to be reformed, or to perhaps feel as though they have a choice in 'what we do' (2013:125).

### Devaluation of Teachers: Compliance vs Creativity

A barrier to having the confidence 'to make ourselves' (Ball, 2013:147) is the feeling of 'deprofessionalisation' (Jeffrey and Woods, 1996). Drawing on the work of Densmore (1987) and Apple and Junck (1992), Jeffrey and Wood recognise this as

Involve[ing] the loss or distillation of skills, routinisation of work, the loss of conceptual, as opposed to operational, responsibilities, the replacement of holism by compartmentalisation, work and bureaucratic overload, the filling and over-filling of time and space, loss of time for reflection and for recovery from stress, the weakening of control and autonomy and, in general, a move from professional to technician status. (Jeffrey and Woods, 1996:138)

This resonates with Ball's notion that 'the reformed teacher is conceived of as simply responsive to external requirements and specified targets' (2003:222). Jeffrey and Woods' (1996) paper found that 'the primary teacher's self is indistinguishable from the professional role' (1996:331). Such a bind between the professional and personal self meant that dividing the two was an emotionally painful experience for the teachers, but one that was 'necessary if technician status is to be achieved' (Jeffrey and Woods, 1996:331); teachers were to relinquish their control and creativity in order to adhere to new policy and set targets. The reward for such compliance lay within the new educational discourse, the goal being to be labelled 'good' or 'outstanding'. In relation to this idea of teachers as technicians, Ball, Maguire, Braun and Hoskins' (2011a) paper explores the reactions of teachers to such imperative policies, such as Ofsted criteria, focusing on 'two different ontological positions from which policy in schools and teachers can be viewed' (Ball et al., 2011a:611). Firstly, there is the exploration of teachers as consumers of policy and how such policies 'make possible particular sorts of teacher subjects' (Ball et al., 2011a). Secondly, they pay close attention to the way in

which policies are 'subject to complex processes of interpretation and translation' (2011a:611). Policy is presented to teaching staff by senior management. There needs to be some consideration given to the way in which policy may be presented and adhered to in different schools. Arguably, some policies will allow for more interpretation than others; imperative policies requiring the achievement of measurable data, however, could be considered to leave less room for interpretation. Ball agrees with Jeffrey and Woods' (1996) argument that imperative policy such as Ofsted standards and targets led teachers 'to do less thinking' (1996:330). Ball and his colleagues state that 'it could be argued that it is "required" that judgement is suspended, and ethical discomforts set aside' (2011a:612). When dealing with such policies, 'compliance is key' (Ball et al., 2011a:613); Jeffrey and Woods link such compliance with deprofessionalisation: '[teachers] began to doubt their competence and adequacy' (1996:329). To comply with certain policies, data must be collected and analysed by the teacher and in turn senior management; observations of the teacher are conducted, and judgements made. With such relentless forms of surveillance, seeds of self-doubt in a teacher's ability may appear. If they are not trusted to teach their pupils without being told what to teach, what qualifies as a good or outstanding lesson and what the children are to achieve, there leaves little room for trust their own abilities as a teacher. Ball et al. argue that the effect of being given measurable data by which to judge competency means 'there is little or no space for 'alternative' interpretations of policy' (Ball et al., 2011a:613). An example of this would be that all pupils should make three sub-levels of progress throughout the year; the analysis of such targets does not consider human factors. Pupils are human, can experience loss, trauma or a myriad of other factors which can affect their progress and which cannot be illustrated on a pupil progress chart. The targets are black and white; the targets are met or not met. Ball et al. argue that what this means in the classroom is a 'consensual culture' as opposed to a 'learning culture' (2011a:614). That is, teachers are altering their practice by consenting to teach for productivity, overthrowing professional judgement 'through the technology of deliverology' (2011a:614). An example of this would be a teacher increasing the amount of English they teach in their timetable and forgoing a music lesson; English is measured, whereas music is not. The enjoyment of the child or consideration of a varied timetable is not the concern, the main drive is for productivity

in the form of results, giving confirmation of the teacher's value and affirming their identity within the perceived norm of the school.

Ball et al. (2011a) observed that the reaction to imperative policies was not the same as the reaction to all other policies; they noticed a particular difference in the acceptance of developmental policies introduced by the New Labour government such as personalised learning and thinking skills (PLTS). A key factor in this acceptance was the requirement for a professional to 'bring judgement, originality and passion' (2011a:615) to the policy implementation. There was an opportunity to feel like a professional and to be creative, something that was also recognised by Troman and colleagues (2007). Troman et al. note that creativity in education was becoming more prevalent around this time, leading to a new discourse being visible in national education policy. This was exemplified through policy initiatives such as Creative Partnerships established in 2001, and influential documents such as Ofsted's report on good practice of creativity 'Expecting the Unexpected' published in 2003 (Troman et al., 2007). This new discourse allowed teachers to combine both creative and performative policies developing 'ownership of the craft and creativity of their practice' (Troman et al., 2007:568). Ball et al. also observed a sense of ownership over developmental policies: 'teachers are engaged in the production of original local texts, methods, artefacts and pedagogies' (2011a:615). This contrasts with the aforementioned 'technical professional' under imperative policies (2011a:612).

The difference in interpretation and translation of policy is a notion that Ball et al. address as 'a process of meaning making which relates the smaller to the bigger picture' (Ball et al., 2011a:619). The classroom teacher is not the initial interpreter of policy rather, 'interpretations are set within a schools' position in relation to policy and the degree of imperative attached to any policy' (Ball et al., 2011a:619). Meanings are made by senior management, priorities set, and values assigned before the policy is delivered and sold to the rest of the staff. Ball et al. separate this process into two: 'interpretation is mainly rationalistic whereas translation is more realistic – closer to the languages of practice' (2011a:620). Translation is part of the teacher's remit, and allows a certain amount of creativity in its production; but amongst this production is the engagement with other 'classroom priorities'. Ball et al. recognise teachers as 'agents in the

mediation and enactment of policy' but they also observe that the discourse of teaching, its meaning and practice, has been formed by 'policy concepts which have sedimented over time in the language of teaching' (2011a:622). This has implications for a teacher's subjectivity because 'what is learning, what is a good teaching, what is improvement, what is a good lesson' (2011a:622) has been created by policy therefore the discourse is inescapable.

Looking more closely at the policy work of teachers in school, Ball, Maguire, Braun and Hoskins offer a 'typology of roles and positions through which teachers engage with policy' (2011b:625). They identify seven distinct types of actors who are involved in the process of interpretation and translation, illustrated in Table 1 (Ball et al., 2011b). What is notable about their approach is the exploration of the argument that identity is not fixed, that there are different actors within policy and that one person may play more than one role.

Policy actors	Policy Work
Narrators	Interpretation, selection and enforcement of meanings, Mainly done by headteachers and the SLT
Entrepreneurs	Advocacy, creativity and integration
Outsiders	Entrepreneurship, partnership and monitoring
Transactors	Accounting, reporting, monitoring
Enthusiasts	Investment, creativity, satisfaction and career
Translators	Production of texts, artefacts and events
Critics	Union representatives: monitoring of management, Maintaining counter-discourses
Receivers	Mainly junior teachers and teaching assistants: coping, Defending and dependency

*Table 1 Policy actors and 'policy work', from Ball et al. (2011b:626)*

There are variations between the different roles a policy actor may undertake and it is noted that these positions are not 'fixed, unified and mutually exclusive' (2011b:626); teachers may undertake more than one role and different schools will have varying distributions of such positions. An NQT (receiver) may also be an 'enthusiast' and in turn be influential in the way in which the policy is adopted into the culture of the school.



The humanist way in which policy is interpreted is powerful, and there are those who have the ability to persuade and cast new light on the possibilities of reforms and engage others in their vision to adopt new policies. Teachers are not one-dimensional but 'have a multiplicity of interests and values' (Ball et al., 2011b:635) which can influence the translation and interpretation of policy. Policy is open to varied interpretation; following that interpretation come varied forms of enactment. For example, it is suggested that within the 'receivers' category, there are 'high levels of compliance' (Ball et al., 2011b:632) compared to the 'narrators' who offer more of a 'vision' for the policy enactment work within the 'narrative of the school' (Ball et al., 2011b:626). This makes sense because the narrators are usually school leaders and should have a grasp on the culture of the school and the best way to implement change.

The shift in teachers' positions and professional selves is a focus for Day, Kington, Stobart and Sammons (2006). Exploring identity in terms of the individual, rather than the school context, they recognise that 'each person had a number of selves, each one focusing on the execution of one role at any given time' (Day et al., 2006:602). In discussion about the fragmented nature of the self, they expand on a post-structuralist comprehension of identity within discourse:

here identity is not a stable entity that people possess, but rather, is constructed within social relations and used by individuals as an interactional resource. (2006:608)

Similar to Ball et al.'s (2011b) argument that teachers move between roles depending on the social context, Day et al. recognise the complex nature of establishing the self within the abundance of policy and school discourse and the battle for the assertion of agency. There are differences between personal and teaching identities which will sometimes interrelate. Within the personal identity, there will be a core sense of morals and beliefs which filters into the teaching identity. This suggests that the teaching identity is more malleable than the personal, which appears to be a more stable structure. Teaching identity 'will be affected by external (policy) and internal (organisational) and personal experiences past and present, and so is not always stable' (2006:610). When discussing agency within a teacher's identity, Day et al. look to the

work of Maclure (1993) who argues that agency will still exist among teachers who are operating within organisational constraints, but

the 'costs' for teachers of asserting their agency in order to achieve their particular individual or professional satisfactions are now higher (2006:610)

These costs may come in the form of the perception by others of the quality of teaching they are providing, relationships with other members of staff and their own professional achievements (Day et al., 2006). This calls into question the manoeuvrability of agency among teachers: does the cost of agency in the interpretation of policy act as a deterrent? When there is the high price, quite literally, of performance related pay, the risk of asserting agency within prescriptive policy may be too high.

Day et al. conclude that teachers are able to 'define themselves' (2006:610) that influence on their practice is not only gained from their current role but

'through their beliefs and values about the kind of teacher they hope to be in the inevitably changing political, social, institutional and personal circumstances'(2006:610)

Beliefs to Day et al., are still important and are not depicted as being abandoned in the face of performativity. Day et al. comment that

'there is also a degree to which agency is expressed by the extent to which people can live with contradictions and tensions within these various identities' (2006:611)

Does the amount of tension and contradiction of beliefs affect the assertion of agency? If there are fewer tensions then does that allow for more manoeuvrability? Or do contradictions with beliefs and enforced practice or pedagogy prompt a greater assertion of agency in retaliation?

### Ball's analysis of teachers

Within Ball's later work (2013) there are glimpses of teacher agency and manoeuvrability within the policy driven education system, yet the overriding image is that of top-heavy policy bearing down on teachers and moulding their shape into a restricted, lesser version of themselves. In his account of two teachers who are

discussed in Jeffrey and Woods (1998:160) study of UK primary school inspections, Diane and Chloe, Ball highlights Diane's 'loss of respect' for herself during the inspection, prompting the reader to immediately associate inspection with loss on the teacher's part. Diane is quoted as being aware that she is 'playing the game' and 'they know [I am]' (2003:222), which according to Ball questions her identity, and thus her grasp on agency, whilst the inspectors are present (2003:222). Ball portrays Diane as being self-aware of her actions in this situation. The confines of inspection policy are strong enough to restrict her actions and change her teaching behaviours, but not so much so as to suppress her knowledge that she is not being 'herself'. It is nevertheless a bleak depiction of a teacher; the reader feels a sense of entrapment with Diane. She is forced into fabricated and inauthentic performances to please inspectors but at the cost of her own 'ontological dilemmas' (2003:222). The inspections are depicted as being of no worth to the teacher, and instead as a process which devalues the self and causes personal loss and dilemmas. Ball portrays the teacher as having no control or agency within the inspection process, and at the mercy of inspection policy and performativity, which he argues removes the 'rationale for practice' and 'the meaningfulness of what they do' (2003:222). There is a huge sense of loss here, which reappears in Ball's discussion of Chloe. He begins, once again, with the idea of the loss of the self: 'this is not 'who she is' and in the heat and noise of reform she cannot 'find herself'' (2003:222). This is taken even further when Ball argues that her 'purposes for teaching, her reasons for becoming and being a teacher have no place' (2003:222). This powerful statement removes all hope for Chloe and her career as a teacher; if the purpose has gone then what else is left? Ball echoes these thoughts by stating that Chloe's story is 'not an uncommon one in the UK' (2003:22), blaming the pressures of performativity and the strict regime it creates for the rising numbers of teachers leaving the education system (2003:22). He continues by quoting an anonymous Head of Drama who made the 'reluctant decision' to leave the profession due to the lack of freedom and initiative within teaching: 'every school has become part of the gulag' (2003:222). Ball's description of these teachers suggests that either they battle with the internal dilemmas that such prescriptive policy evokes, or they accept that the purpose of their career has been lost and they leave. Both alternatives paint a depressing picture of teachers and the education system.

Ball has an agenda that has been driven by critiquing policy. He has clear and valid concerns for teachers working within today's plethora of policy, and despite being written fifteen years ago, his 2003 paper is still relevant in today's education system. But we might ask whether the situation is really as bleak as the picture he paints of it? For example, Chloe does state, 'I don't feel as though I am working with the children, I'm working at the children and it's not a very pleasant experience' (2003:222). From her words, it appears that she is not engaged with her work and not satisfied with the teacher she has become. However, there is an awareness that what she is doing is not right, and that her 'performance' goes against her beliefs about what a teacher should be, highlighting her sense of contradiction between her teacher self and what must be done to conform with policy. Thus, policy is not wholly consuming of thoughts and ideals, and both Chloe and Diane know how they would like to teach; their consciousness of their potential agency is married with a despair that they cannot act upon it, but could those feelings change with a change in circumstance? In this sense, policy and scrutiny of inspectors is defeating the manoeuvrability of their agency and desired teaching identity, but I would argue that the response to policy is not wholly down to the individual. Teachers need to be recognised within the context they are in and we should not ignore the complexity of relationships with others and the pushes and pulls that different schools and contexts may produce. I am one of the teachers Ball is talking about; he is looking from the outside in, but if I take a view from the inside looking out, might things appear differently?

As I explained in Chapter 1, my sense of understanding and my interpretations of different situations changed over time. Awareness of being asked to do the impossible in terms of target setting and performativity meant that in retrospect and after self-reflection, I saw situations from a different perspective. I do not fully recognise Diane and Chloe in Ball's depiction; there are aspects of their portrayal which I identify with - performing for Ofsted, feeling pressurised by target setting - but not the total loss of the self. This thesis is about looking from inside out rather than from the outside in, and it aims to explore the possibilities of a different view. Thus, it poses the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of teacher agency in a performative context: to what extent do teachers experience their work as agentic and what role does this play in their sense of self as a teacher?
2. Where does agency lie within decision making? How are decisions made and what choices do teachers feel they have? How do those choices relate to the overall school context?
3. Are there particular acts or values that have significance?

Over the course of the next chapter I discuss how the methodological implications of approaching these questions from the inside, out.

## Chapter 3 – Methodological and theoretical framework: an Insider's Perspective

In this chapter I outline the methodological and theoretical positions which underpin the exploration of teacher subjectivity in this thesis, together with the details of data collection and analysis. I begin by discussing insider research as a methodology and its relevance in this thesis. I draw on Peshkin's theoretical and methodological treatment of the notion of subjectivity; this is a key consideration for a researcher undertaking insider research. Initially I discuss Peshkin's ideas about subjectivity, before turning the lens on my own subjectivity as a teacher and researcher. I identify my own 'Situational Identities', formed throughout my teaching career, and give an overview of their formation and what has influenced each new identity. I explore the way in which this investigation of my subjectivity acts as a lens through which to conduct my research, and how this influences my analysis of the data. Following this exploration of the self, I detail the methods of data collection, in the form of journal entries and interviews; I explain the selection process for each journal entry, its focus and reason for writing. I then discuss the role and relevance of autoethnography in my research. In the next section I introduce the interviewees and explain the reasoning behind their selection; I also address the ethical dilemmas and concerns which are associated in the collection of such data.

### Insider research and the inside out approach

Being an actor in the world that I was to investigate meant that I conducted insider research, which was also befitting with the theme of the thesis, 'from the inside looking out'. Brannick and Coghlan (2007) define insider research as:

Those undertaking research in and on their own organisations while a complete member, which in this context, means both having preunderstanding and access and wanting the choice to remain on a desired career path when the research is complete. (2007:71)

As a teacher I have a very good, lived understanding of educational organisations and certain issues that surround teacher agency; in line with Brannick and Coghlan's definition, the intention was to continue in my role as a teacher after the research was

concluded. This differs to organisational research because as a member of an organisation, I was not visiting temporarily - 'organisational research [that] is conducted by researchers who temporarily join the organisation for the purposes and duration of the research.' (2007:59). The organisation, in terms of my research and data collection, was the education system and the different school contexts inhabited by my interviewees and reflected in my own journal entries. As a teacher within the education system, I was more of an insider than Ball, affording me with greater insider knowledge and, potentially, access. By access I do not mean the process of speaking to teachers or gaining entry to different school contexts; rather, I mean that having lived life as one of the body of teachers Ball that writes about, I had a level of understanding which allowed me to pick up on subtleties and nuances that an outsider or temporary visitor such as Ball may have missed. Mercer (2007) comments on the advantages of having such insider knowledge:

With regard to the issue of familiarity, insiders will undoubtedly have a better initial understanding of the social setting because they know the context; they understand the subtle and diffuse the links between situations and events; and they can assess the implications of following particular avenues of inquiry. (2007:6)

I did not focus on one school or organisation for my research; to give myself a wider breadth of study, I planned to focus on teachers at different stages in their career, their school contexts being more of a sub-plot. As a teacher who had experienced different school contexts, such insider knowledge allowed me 'familiarity' with and 'understanding' of various school contexts; this enabled me to explore 'links between situations and events' in regard to teacher agency, and how it presented itself. Advantages of insider research meant that I had already 'built up knowledge of the organisation from being an actor in the process being studied' (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007:66). As a teacher, like Ball's subjects, I was able to investigate his claims about teacher identity from an insider's perspective; my experience as an actor in the educational system had led me to question his claims about the effect of policy on teacher agency, and I saw this as an opportunity to 'generate contextually embedded

knowledge that emerges from experience' (2007:60). Lived experience could aid my research and allow a deeper understanding of the data collected.

Conversely, there are arguments that oppose insider research. For example, Mercer's 2007 paper refers to the challenges of insider research in its title 'wielding a double-edged sword and resolving delicate dilemmas'. She acknowledges the advantages of familiarity but provides a counter argument in that:

Greater familiarity can make insiders more likely to take things for granted, develop myopia and assume their own perspective is far more widespread than it actually is. (2007:6)

In order to avoid such myopia, a major focus and theoretical/methodological lens in this thesis is my analysis of my own subjectivity, drawing on Peshkin (1988a). This focus not only illuminates my own subjectivity, but also its role in my research and understanding of my data. As Brannick and Coghlan (2007) state:

Insiders are perceived to be prone to charges of being too close, and thereby, not attaining the distance and objectivity deemed to be necessary for valid research. (2007:60)

However, in the exploration of my subjectivity, I alerted both myself and the reader to my areas of concern and interest. This subjectivity was not removed from the research process, it was made an integral part of it and allowed recognition and awareness to achieve 'the distance and objectivity' for effective inquiry.

Mercer (2007) comments on the advantages and disadvantages of rapport with those who take part in the insider research process. The advantages are that, as an insider, knowledge affords the researcher with a certain amount of rapport, 'a fact that may engender a greater level of candour than otherwise would be the case' (2007:7). As I was a teacher who has worked within pressurised school contexts, it is likely that other teachers may have felt that they were able to speak freely about their experiences because we have a mutual understanding of the daily demands of the education system. There was an understanding that I knew that their job entailed more than addressing a class and marking books; I understood what the threat of Ofsted meant and the pressure



to demonstrate a child's progress. Such things also did not need to be explained, which left more scope for addressing the significant issues that lay at the forefront of my research questions. However, Mercer also recognises that there is a contrary argument to the benefits of such familiarity, since 'people may not share certain information with an insider for fear of being judged' (2007:7). I considered this possibility in the choice of my research subjects; initially I interviewed my current head teacher, but after considering issues of power and Mercer's observations on judgement, I excluded him from the study and selected people who I was not working with in order to allow a greater sense of distance between us. The interviewees I invited expressed a willingness to speak about their practice and pedagogy; I expand on the interview process later in this chapter.

Another issue with insider familiarity is highlighted by Brannick and Coghlan (2007). They note the effect this might have on the researcher when interviewing subjects:

They may assume too much and so not probe as much as if they were outsiders or ignorant of the situation. They may think that they know the answer and not expose their current thinking to alternative reframing. (2007:69)

Having knowledge of educational contexts and issues meant that more time was spent probing the issue and analysing it at a deeper level. An assumption of shared understandings with the interviewees meant that there was more time in the interview for me to pursue certain events and to realise the reactions and feelings that such events produced.

Reflexivity is key in effective insider research, something recognised by Brannick and Coghlan (2007):

Potential researchers, through a process of reflexivity, need to be aware of the strengths and limits of their preunderstanding so that they can use their experiential and theoretical knowledge to reframe their understanding of situations to which they are close. (2007:72)

My journal entries provided an insight into my preunderstanding, as discussed later in this chapter. Used in conjunction with theory, these enabled me to analyse my interview

data and reshape my thinking. The exposure of such preunderstanding meant that my judgement was not clouded by it; instead, it served as a lens to gain a deeper level of understanding, and enabled me to ask questions of the data that I may not have asked. I discuss the journal entries in more detail later in this chapter.

#### *Peshkin and the researcher's search for Subjectivity*

The literature explored in Chapter 2 revealed the way in which the outside, in terms of policy and targets, can affect the individual. At the end of Chapter 2 I concluded that this thesis should be concerned with looking from the inside out. In order to do this, I needed to be conscious of my own lens and so I chose Peshkin's work (1994), (1988a), (1988b), (2000) to do so. A great deal of his work is concerned with the awareness of the self and one's subjectivity when researching and how this may influence both research, data gathered and the interpretation of such data. If I am to be true to the title of my thesis, this is something that needs to be explored in depth.

Peshkin's (1988a) paper argued that 'subjectivity operates during the entire research process' (1988a:17). Consciously or unconsciously, the researcher brings with them 'an amalgam of [the] persuasions' (1988a:17) which will interact with the research process. Peshkin argues that while some researchers are aware of their subjectivity and may even acknowledge it within their research, they do not necessarily 'attend to their subjectivity in a meaningful way' (1988a:17). For example, they may state that they are aware of certain personal outlooks or concerns, but unless they apply some meaning or engagement with their research, such acknowledgements are meaningless. Peshkin wrote his 1988a paper with the aim of educating researchers on how and why to 'be meaningfully attentive to their own subjectivity' (1988a:17) within each new research context. He maintained that subjectivity within research was not something that could be separated from the research process, no matter how non-judgemental the researcher would claim to be; there would always be part of one's self that would be bounded within the research process, 'one's subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed. It is insistently present in both the research and non-research aspects of our lives' (1988a:17). Peshkin also argued that one's subjectivity will not be the same for each research setting; each new setting will elicit a different 'subset of personal

qualities', and subjectivity should be considered throughout the course of the research process, not looked back upon retrospectively. The reason for this was because the researcher needed to be continually aware of the effect this 'subset of personal qualities' (1988a:17) could have on the whole research process:

These qualities have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement. (1988a:17)

Peshkin wanted the researcher to ensure that the reader was aware when the subject or research context and the self became intertwined, and that the writing was not blinded or restricted by unconsidered personal feelings.

In the course of his own research, Peshkin became 'acutely aware' (1988a:17) of his own subjectivity during eleven months of fieldwork at Riverview High School, electing to examine it further to aid himself and to provide a guide for other researchers. This resulted in the development of a set of 'Subjective I's' which he argued were fixed, a core part of our identity and personality. Although this may appear to contradict my arguments in Chapter 2 that identity is more fluid, he continues by stating that the 'I's' 'may change from place to place' (1988a:18) and referred to this as 'Situational Subjectivity':

By this concept I suggest that though we bring all of ourselves – our full complement of subjective I's – to each new research site, a site will only elicit a subset of our I's. (1988a:18)

Here there is an intrinsic sense of being within every new context; identity and ways of being alter, but we bring a core sense of identity, what has formed our epistemology, which influences our responses to new contexts. Ball's account suggests that part of the self is lost or at least, in the case of Chloe and Diane, has to be abandoned, but Peshkin argues that 'we bring all of ourselves' but only part of our subjectivity will be elicited. The loss of the self does not make sense to Peshkin; we are put in different contexts and react in different ways but we maintain our subjectivity, a rooted sense of self that remains the same. This is why he felt it so important for researchers to be aware of their subjectivity when conducting research.

To illuminate this, during his Riverview fieldwork, Peshkin tracked his subjectivity. In order to identify it, he 'looked for the warm and the cool spots, the emergence of positive and negative feelings' (1988a:18). When he noticed feelings of positivity or negativity he noted them down on a card and documented them. This table provides a brief overview of the six 'Subjective I's' that Peshkin discovered.

I's	Foundation	Key Concepts	Implications
Ethnic Maintenance I	Religion	When Peshkin saw 'ethnic maintenance behaviour in Riverview, [he] identified with it' (1988a:18). He understood those who wished to maintain their ethnic identity and 'got a warm feeling from it' (1988a:18).	Peshkin recognised that by feeling such an affinity with those who cherished their ethnicity, it may lead to him '[ignoring] the lives of those who chose not to' (1988a:18).
Community Maintenance I	Community	Peshkin discovered this I most intensely when visiting 'Mario's Snack Shop' (1988a:18). The sense of community and conversations of the regulars that returned weekly and daily led to Peshkin visiting 'every day for 2 months' (1988a:18).	By having such a strong attraction to the regulars of the snack shop, Peshkin 'tied myself to the Riverview oldtimers' (1988a:18) meaning that he was inattentive to the 'continuing flow of newcomers' (1988a:19).
E-Pluribus-Unum I	Diversity	Peshkin noted the ethnic diversity amongst the Riverview High School pupils, 'a student population that was white (33%), black (33%), Hispanic (20%), Filipino (12%), and the rest American Indian, Vietnamese' (1988a:19). He observed that not only were they in the same location and this was not a reflection of the community as a whole, but they all integrated and the ethnic groups were not divided.	Peshkin understood that although this was something he found personally pleasing, he needed to be conscious that he did not exaggerate 'the magnitude of mingling among Riverview's 1,600 students' (1988a:19).
Justice Seeking I	Denigration	During a parent-teacher seminar Peshkin was told about instances of denigration against both the town and residents (1988a). Examples involved a woman who had a daughter who was allowed to stay with friends who lived outside of Riverview, but they were never allowed to come to Riverview to repay the visit (1988a). Peshkin encountered his own version when a sales assistant questioned whether he was visiting Riverview to 'study pollution or crime in the streets' (1988a:19).	Peshkin felt emotional distress when uncovering this I, he was 'moved to investigate it as systematically as I could' (1988a:19). Therefore he realised that he must 'take account' (1988a:19) of such feelings in his writing.

Pedagogical-Meliorist I	Poor teaching	This I 'emerged from seeing ordinary-to-poor instruction given to youngsters who would suffer, I imagined, as a consequence' (1988a:19). Peshkin felt as though he wanted to correct the teaching which was an unusual feeling as previously he had always viewed himself as 'neither an evaluator nor reformer' (1988a:19).	Within this I, Peshkin 'risked undermining the integrity of the non-judgemental persona' (1988a:20) he had established with the teachers at Riverview.
Non-Research Human I	Acceptance and Welcoming	Peshkin felt that this I was outside the remit of his research, when he felt a certain degree of acceptance and welcoming from the community in which he was working. For example, when his wife was invited to be 'an honorary but full participant' (1988:20) of the Woman's League for the time that they were visiting.	The danger of this I was that it may 'soften one's judgement' (1988a:20) and 'reduce the distance between self and subjects' (1988a:20).

*Table 2 Peshkin's I's*

Peshkin's analysis of his subjectivity allowed him a deeper understanding of himself as a researcher and had an effect, in turn, on his interpretation and analysis of his data. The exploration of the self, helped to inform the reader of his epistemology as a researcher; the process started from the inner self and looked outwards, he identified his cool and warm spots and in doing so alerted himself to possible areas of bias and implications for his study. The researcher's epistemology is not being denied or muted, rather acknowledged and part of the research process:

if researchers are informed about the qualities that have emerged during their research, they can at least disclose to their readers where the self and the subject became joined. (1988a:17)

Peshkin's discovery of his warm feelings allowed him to recognise the consequences this may have had on his research. For example, his 'Ethnic Maintenance I' elucidated his affiliation with those who took pride in retaining their ethnicity. Riverview was a city with high deprivation and with a hugely diverse ethnic community; the school was a 'multi-ethnic school of 1600 pupils' (1988a:18). Peshkin described speaking to Jessie, a Mexican woman about the times when she felt 'most Mexican' and would interact with 'her people' (1988a:18). As a Jewish man who felt that 'being Jewish shape[d] my life' (1988a:18), Peshkin understood the desire to withhold and take pride in one's ethnicity:

I identified with it; I got a warm feeling from it, I saw people doing something that I realised that I do myself, and I valued it. (1988a:18)

A closer look at the implications for his study, meant Peshkin acknowledged that he identified with people such as Jessie, who valued their ethnicity and the upkeep of ethnic traditions. But he also recognised that this could potentially blind him from giving credence to those who did not; he was in danger of perceiving the school through one set of values and beliefs, 'while failing to give credence to the meanings of people whose concerns direct them toward assimilation' (1988a:18). Similarly, he identified with the regular customers at Mario's Snack Shop. It was frequented by members of well-established families within the community who viewed Riverview as 'their town' (1988a:18). Peshkin likened this to his own experience in Mansfield 'where I had first discovered my attachment to community and concerns for its survival' (1988a:19). His enjoyment of observing and interacting with such a group highlighted his affection for preservation of the old and established, much like his regard for maintaining ethnicity. In terms of his research, the 'Community Maintenance I' made him acknowledge that in his preoccupation with the old and established members of Riverview and their nostalgia, he may be diverted from the concerns of the 'continuing flow of newcomers' (1988a:19) whose concerns were more focused towards education and 'political house cleaning for the city' (1988a:19).

Not all the 'Subjective Is' elicited warm feelings; both the 'Justice Seeking I' and 'Pedagogical-Meliorist I' evoked feelings of frustration and judgement. 'Pedagogical Meliorist I' conflicted the most with Peshkin's role as a researcher. As someone who had observed many teachers and lessons during years of fieldwork in different educational settings, Peshkin maintained that he had previously been able to detach judgment from poorly taught classes; during his time at Riverview new and 'surprising' feelings were aroused. The children he was observing at Riverview were the 'underclass of America' (1988a:20) and Peshkin felt a greater sense of injustice that these children were being inadequately taught, so much so that he blurred the lines of the role of a researcher and agreed to plan 'with the basketball coach how to promote the academic success of his players.' (1988a:20). Such steps removed the non-judgemental mask of the researcher and could have risked other teachers becoming uncomfortable in being observed for

fear of criticism. In line with this theme of injustice, Peshkin's research in Riverview was shaped in some part by the discovery of 'Justice Seeking I'. At a parent teacher meeting, Peshkin was made aware of outsiders' views of Riverview and the effect this was having on the people who lived there. For example, a parent told him that her child had friends who lived in a different town, and her daughter was allowed to stay the night at the friend's houses, but the parents would not allow their child to stay the night in Riverview. Peshkin gained a deeper understanding of this 'denigration' of Riverview when an assumption was made by a shop clerk that he must be in Riverview to 'study pollution or crime in the streets' (1988a:19). Peshkin admitted that he found this denigration 'distressing' which prompted him to 'investigate it as systematically as [he] could' (1988a:19). In this case, such high emotions were in danger of making him 'defensive in a way that that would not facilitate [my] understanding of denigration' (1988a:19).

Peshkin's exploration of subjectivity highlights where a researcher may find the gap closing between the self and the subject. Affiliation and feelings of empathy meant that there were occasions when his role of researcher was forgotten and feelings of a personal nature took over. His evaluation of the self and his subjectivity illuminated areas where his view, and thus his research, may have become impartial had he not been consciously aware of his subjectivity. Peshkin's argument is for the researcher to understand that a researcher's subjectivity will be apparent in any research site, consciously or unconsciously, with new subjective I's elicited in new sites. To avoid a biased study, and as previously mentioned when discussing insider research, the identification of subjectivity is paramount; working from the inside during the research adds clarity to the outside in terms of how and what is being discovered:

There is ample room for an affection that serves to remind one of obligations to his respondents, and for a dispassion that, as horseradish does in the nasal passages, clears his vision. (1988a:20)

### [In Search of My Subjectivity](#)

The theme of this thesis is 'from the inside out'; if I am to take Peshkin's work seriously and to enable a different view from Ball, with the possibility of uncovering nuances he may have missed, I need to offer my readers an insight into my own subjectivity. I am

conducting my research as a teacher, although there may be other 'I's'; initially I wanted to address my professional subjectivity. My own set of 'Subjective I's' have been developed taking account of which 'I's' have had the most notable influence on my teaching and pedagogy (see Table 3). In the exposition of these 'I's' it must be acknowledged that they are situational and hence will be referred to as 'Situational I's'. One 'Historical I', and the key concepts behind it, are considered and this pervades my 'Situational I's'. Some may disagree with the naming of my 'Historical I', but it has been given careful consideration. The 'Historical I' is core and deeply rooted within me, everything I do and how I behave in my life is associated with this personal and historical 'I'. The 'Historical I' is presented as separate from the 'Situational I's' in the table because, much like Peshkin's 'Subjective I's', they change from place to place, whereas the 'Historical I' stays steadfast. Much of the basis of the 'Historical I' stems from the trauma of losing a parent suddenly and at a young age. The sudden death of my father when I was eleven has led to characteristics in my behaviour that I have recognised in terms of my professional attributes and have separated into three relevant 'I's', 'Controlling I', 'Pleasing I', 'Worker I'.

I's	Foundation	Key Concepts Of Intrinsic I	
Intrinsic I	Childhood and Life experiences	<p><b>Controlling I</b> Losing a parent at a young age has meant that I recognise I have a desire to control what I can. Sudden changes to plans or to not be informed of alterations means I can sometimes find it hard to adapt.</p> <p><b>Pleasing I</b> An inherent desire to please. Possibly as the eldest child and going through trauma so young I seek approval of others and will always aim to please and to avoid confrontation.</p> <p><b>Worker I</b> Having been given the opportunity of private schooling by a hard working mother, there is a sense of debt I feel I must repay which is reflected in the work that I do. There is a sense that my own achievements reflect the work she put in to give me my education.</p>	



Situational I's	Foundation	Key Concepts of Situational I's	Contradictions/Unions with Intrinsic I
Enforced I	As an NQT in an area of high deprivation with forceful senior management.	As a first job I had limited expectations, but the role did not elicit warm feelings. Senior management were very prescriptive, and staff were under constant scrutiny. Files and lessons were observed frequently leading to low morale among staff, a high percentage of whom had left after new management had joined two years previously.	There are clear contradictions with my Intrinsic I within the Enforced I. I was not in control of my teaching, but eager to please, thus relinquishing the reins on my pedagogy. My nature is to work hard yet there was no reward or recognition for this which means both the Pleasing I and Worker I is unsated.
Finding Pedagogy I	In the second school of my career there was more freedom in terms of policy and targets but more behavioural issues with pupils.	Teachers were not scrutinised as incessantly as at my first school and it felt as though there was a lot more trust given to teachers within the school to teach in their own style. The challenge was engaging the children. The school was in an area of high deprivation and behaviour amongst some pupils was a serious issue.	Within this context my Worker I and Pleasing I were replete. The struggle was to maintain control within a classroom when some pupils did not respond to instruction and could also become violent. I was not always in control and often would not predict outbursts. This elicited feeling of anxiety in the struggle to assert authority to abate such behaviour and engage the children with their education.
Social Worker I	During my time at this school there were children in my care who required involvement from social services and my input as their teacher.	My role had broadened from simply an educator to a counsellor and ally for some children. Meetings with pupils, social workers and parents were not uncommon.	I was not in control over what happened to these children, it made me re-evaluate the purpose of school for some children, for a few it was a safe haven and school work was simply a by-product. There was an emotional struggle with my Intrinsic Controlling I at being limited in what I was able to do to help such children. My Social Worker I was present throughout my other Situational I's at this school.
Target Driven I	Over the course of my time at my second school targets and policy started to encroach on the previous	After two years without targets and policy ruling my pedagogy tracking sheets and targets were the main topics of weekly staff meeting as was the impending Ofsted visit.	Not only did this new regime conflict with my Controlling I after such a long bout of comparative freedom but also with my Situational Social Worker I.

	pedagogical freedom teacher had enjoyed.	Scrutiny in the form of 'learning walks', book scrutiny and lesson observations became a half termly occurrence.	These two Situational I's were in conflict, targets were being set and accelerated progress was to be made but with no regard to the child's background or home life. The tables of progress had become the forefront of the school's concern.
Creative I	After another two years at the school and working under immense pressure, I felt I could not return after having my first child and sought to move closer to family in London.	I started a new job in a private school and was astounded at the freedom awarded to the teachers. The paperwork was minimal; assessment was twice a year, book scrutiny and lesson observations once a year and a tremendous sense of trust in staff and their pedagogy.	This situation sated all my Intrinsic I's; I was in control in the classroom, staff were more relaxed and my desire to please was rewarded with good relationships with pupils, staff and parents. The anxiety from my last role had dispersed and there was a sense of belonging and coming home.

*Table 3 Exploration of my subjectivity*

It is the relationship of these three 'I's' with my 'Situational I's' which help to form the basis of the search for my own subjectivity. Having started my Master's in my NQT year, there is a written record, in the form of journal entries and written assignments, charting the change in 'Situational I's' from the beginning of my teaching career, which clearly identifies my warm and cool spots. I used such writing to elicit feelings of affection and frustration and chart the progression of my pedagogy and 'Situational I's' in chronological order from NQT to present day. The contradictions and unions of contexts of the 'Situational I's' with the 'Historical I's' illuminates my subjectivity, giving a clear understanding of the inside before I start working towards the outside.

The beginning of my teaching career started in an area of Manchester with high deprivation and with a formidable senior management team. As an NQT it was to be expected that a lot of the first year was to be spent taking advice from those more experienced and to expect to find it tough. After speaking to others on the Master's course, it became apparent that the level of prescription and unofficial observations in my first school was not the norm for other NQTs. The focus of my writing at this time was on power relations and oppression, and my journal entries were filled with anecdotes outlining feelings of anxiousness and scrutiny. For example, in one entry I described the deputy head's unexpected presence in the classroom as 'conjuring up

images of a shark circling its helpless victim before sinking its teeth in'. The focus of the school was on assessment and data; paperwork and files were constantly being examined and staff meetings provoked feelings of dread at a possible new, paper-heavy initiative being introduced, yet another means of being judged and inspected. There were constant references to feelings of 'panic' and 'loss'. At this point in my career I was working under an enforced regime. I lacked the experience and confidence to do anything apart from what was asked of me. There were huge conflicts between this 'Enforced I' and my 'Historical I's' which led to feelings of frustration and powerlessness. My 'Intrinsic Pleasing I' craved approval which was rarely granted. An example of this which still lives vividly in my mind was overhearing the deputy head telling another staff member outside my room that she thought I was 'very good'; it was a small comment, not formally shared with me, but one that brought me to tears afterwards because there was so little encouragement or warmth within the school. The conflict between the 'Situational' and 'Historical I' evoked strong emotions, which in turn clarified my situational subjectivity in this context. This clarification is important for my research; I am aware that I could feel sympathy towards anyone who feels they are under a restrictive regime. My experience has been and gone and it is important that I do not let feelings of injustice or empathy cloud my judgement or stop me from viewing a situation from a different perspective.

Following the 'Enforced I' came an 'I' which elicited much warmer feelings, 'Finding Pedagogy I'. After the strict regime and prescriptive nature of my first school setting, the second school I worked in afforded a more relaxed and nurturing environment towards pupils and teachers. The school was based, once again, in an area of high deprivation but its ethos and outlook were far removed from the previous context. It was here that I was allowed to find my own way and given room, in the form of freedom and experimentation, to do so. The school was not without challenges; pupil behaviour could often be volatile and violent, restraint training was given to all staff and police were frequent visitors on the school site. This did have the potential to disrupt the union with my 'Controlling I'; the behaviour of some pupils was inconsistent meaning support was sometimes needed to calm the situation. My 'Social Worker I' also emerged at this time and was in conflict with my 'Controlling I'. There were a large number of children within

the school who required support from outside agencies and there were many occasions when I spent time away from teaching to help with other aspects of a child's life. For example, I spent an afternoon with a child in my class who wanted me to scribe a letter to her mother who she saw infrequently. The school was understanding of such situations and although my 'Controlling I' was disrupted such situations were taken into account when measuring a child's progress which helped to sate my 'Worker I'. Despite the challenges, 'Finding Pedagogy I' married well with parts of my 'Historical I'. For example, the 'Pleasing I' was appeased by the amount of encouragement and appreciation felt amongst the staff and there was a sense of trust between staff and senior management that they were capable without an extensive amount of scrutiny. In this case it was my preference that teachers were allowed more freedom, I need to be aware in the collection and analysis of my data that this may not be the case for all teachers. Coming from such a restrictive previous school, it was welcome that there was a large amount of freedom, others may have struggled with this and desired more structure.

The last two years at my second school, September 2009 to March 2011, when I left, were lived as 'Target Driven I'. With the threat of an Ofsted visit drawing closer, gradually the topics of staff meetings were pervaded with Ofsted criteria and more observations and tracking sheets crept into the normality of school life. The goalposts had been moved, and in line with government criteria, it was necessary to provide evidence of a child's progress. The sense of freedom slowly ebbed away, the bi-yearly tracking sheets were recreated into half termly tracking sheets, the more ad hoc informal meetings about a class's progress were replaced with performance management meetings, accompanied with seemingly impossible targets. Everything had become more regimented, it had always been stated by the head that we, as a school, were driven by the care for the children, not by the results. It would seem that there was also a care to uphold the school's 'outstanding' status, a hard task in an area of deprivation. As the likelihood of an inspection grew closer and the targets to attain 'outstanding' grew harder to meet, the school became a more pressurised environment. A lot of my Master's and early doctoral writing at this time was focused on assessment and the pressures of Ofsted, and there was a great feeling of inequity between what a

child should be able to achieve and, in the case of a lot of the children at this school, what was happening at home. For example, if a child's house had been raided by the police in the early hours of the morning, was it right to expect them to work to a set standard? There was a lot of frustration and anger in my writing at this time as all parts of my 'Historical I's' were unsettled. My 'Pleasing I' could not be fulfilled because a lot of the targets that had been set seemed unobtainable. For example, in a performance management meeting I was told that I had to accelerate the learning of three pupils with special educational needs. This was not the norm as it was usually accepted that if pupils needed extra support they would not be expected to progress as quickly as their peers. My 'Controlling I' had no control over the situation and my 'Worker I' was being judged on the results. In the midst of this situation it was evident from journal entries that I felt a great deal of injustice and frustration; re-examining these as part of my research after gaining a deeper understanding of my subjectivity may result in a different perspective. By looking from the inside and revisiting previous contexts and associated emotions, will that give me a different view of the outside? There needs to be a mindfulness to disallow previous emotions, linked with targets and assessment, which may blinker my view or direct my research in a different direction.

'Creative I' was named because in all aspects of my current role I am the creator and in charge of what is being taught. I left the previous school and the city for a private school in my hometown. Every part of this role marries with my 'Historical I' and has resulted in work being an enjoyable part of my life.

My research process was influenced by own experiences as a teacher, and the 'Situational I's' under the shadow of my 'Historical I' have formed the basis of my current pedagogy. Peshkin acknowledges how interpretation and the researcher's own perceptions can affect the data collection and how it is analysed.

At the many crossroads of my interpretative journey, I made decisions that affected the meaning of old data, the new data I sought to collect, the ongoing substance of my thinking and what eventually I would write. (Peshkin, 2000:5)

The contradictions and unions with my 'Historical I' allow an insight into my 'interpretative journey' and why such situations may have felt warm or cool. My

experience is not that of others, just as Peshkin needed to be mindful not to 'overstate the magnitude of mingling' (1988a:19) among students, I must not overstate, nor project my own experiences onto those who form part of my research. The purpose of this exploration of subjectivity is to illuminate and allow for more meaningful research. My subjectivity will add meaning as it will be present and used throughout the thesis, so I begin inside with myself and look out to find new perspectives.

### Autoethnography in the form of journal entries

As discussed above, a key factor of effective insider research is the researcher's ability to be reflexive. In order not to cloud my research with assumptions and presuppositions I looked to previous writing, in the form of the journal entries that I had written during my Master's and early in my doctorate study, in order to highlight previous opinions and ideas. In this sense, I approached the research and data analysis in an autoethnographic manner: 'Autoethnographers recognise the innumerable ways personal experience influences the research' (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011:346). In line with Peshkin's focus on the researcher's subjectivity Ellis et al comment that:

'autoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters.' (2011:346)

Autoethnography allows me to be open about my subjectivity and inform the reader of my influences and perceptions. Subjectivity is not simply stated, it becomes part of the analysis and research, thus staying true to Peshkin's views on conducting research. Using Peshkin's lens and exploring my subjectivity allows complex stories to be told and new meanings of situations to be realised. Using previous writing encourages reflexivity and can lead to new ways of thinking. Using the interviews to view others' perspectives affords a recognition that 'different kinds of people possess different assumptions about the world' (2011:346) and to re-examine my previous writing through a different lens.

It must be noted that there are dilemmas that accompany all qualitative research, including autoethnographic form of inquiry. Ellis et al. state that:

The memory is fallible, that it is impossible to recall or report events in language that exactly represents how those events were lived and felt; and we recognise that people who have experienced the “same” event often tell different stories about what happened. (2011:353)

It is with these considerations in mind that I ensured I was reflexive in my analysis; I chose autoethnography as a method, to use my ‘own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on the self and look more deeply at self-other interactions’ (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:740). I acknowledge that the reliability of my journal entries and the stories I told could be called into question, are the recounts of what happened ‘factual’? (Bochner, 2002). Plummer (2001) comments:

What matters is the way in which the story enables the reader to enter the subjective world of the teller – to see the world from his or her point of view, even if this world does not ‘match’ reality. (2001:401)

I acknowledge that my journal entries are based on my own interpretation of events, Peshkin’s approach means my subjectivity is explored in great depth, highlighting my influences and perceptions to myself and the reader. The journal entries are not analysed separately from the interviews, the interviews allow me to return to the journal entries with new insight, meaning I am not solely relying on my own stories to inform my research.

After exploring my subjectivity, I selected journal entries from key points in my career; the selection process and reasoning is discussed in the following section. Throughout my Master’s and Doctorate course, there was a requirement to keep journal entries. I used such journal entries as part of action learning set discussions, and at other times, I used them as data in written assignments. Often, I had written entries about things that had concerned or frustrated me, when I had felt oppressed or restricted, or a significant event had occurred; now I want to use such entries in my thesis as a reflexive tool. With new understanding of my ‘Situational Identities’ and the exploration of the outsider, in the form of interview data, could I achieve new insights and perspectives on past events? Was there more manoeuvrability for agency than I had initially considered? And what did this look like?

### Journal Entries - selection and details

In this section I describe each journal entry in this thesis in chronological order. I present an overview of the journal entries in the table below, detailing dates they were written and my teacher and student context at those times. The journal entries were written in accordance with my own perceptions and memory of events at the time. Some entries record conversations and are written as transcriptions, but these were written from memory and are therefore coloured by my memory of what was said and happened. These conversations, and other events recorded in the journal, were always written up on the evening of the day that they occurred: I made notes in a diary during the day so as to stay as “true” to the event as possible. My exploration of these entries in the data analysis treats such conversations as influenced by my opinion, not as fact.

The purpose of the journal entries is to look at how I saw the world and relate them to my ‘Situational I’s’. The entries chart times in my career when I have felt restricted in terms of agency as well as charting career progression and highlighting significant events at certain times. Within the entries, there is a focus on the role of teachers and the journal entries offer an insight into what I perceive my role to be, my perception of others and my perceived restrictions on agency. All but one journal entry, journal entry 8, were written whilst teaching in performative driven schools; they provide the insider’s perspective on where agency lies within a performative education system and offer an insight into how my perceptions change during the shift from Master’s to Doctoral studies. In this section, each journal entry will be addressed and reasons for selecting the journal entry will be explained.

Journal Entry	Date	Teaching Context	Student Context
Journal Entry 1	June 2007	NQT – First school	Master’s
Journal Entry 2	June 2008	NQT – First school	Master’s
Journal Entry 3a, Journal Entry 3b	October 2010 November 2010	Student Mentor – Second school	Doctorate
Journal Entry 4	April 2011	Student Mentor – Second school	Doctorate
Journal Entries 5a & b Journal Entry 5c	November 2011 December 2011	Student Mentor – Second school	Doctorate



Journal Entries 6a & b	November 2011	Student Mentor – Second school	Doctorate
Journal Entry 7	December 2011	Student Mentor – Second school	Doctorate
Journal Entry 8	May 2015	Current school	Doctorate

Table 4 List of Journal Entries

*Journal Entry 1 – June 2007: A reflection on an impromptu lesson observation in my NQT year by the deputy head.*

This journal entry was taken from my Master’s journal. I wrote it because at the time I was noting down any instances where power relations within the school hierarchy came into play. We were asked to keep journals of issues or events that were meaningful to us; the assertion of power within the school was something that interested me greatly because it was exercised in both an overt and passive aggressive manner. I wrote it to share with my action learning set and to discuss at a Master’s session but writing such instances down also gave me an opportunity to reflect on what had happened and to question the motives behind it. At the time of writing, I was in my NQT year and working in a highly prescriptive environment. I was very unhappy in my job and often felt anxious that I was not doing the right thing. I wrote about this in my Master’s journal often in order to discuss the situation with my action learning set and to inform assignments based on power and identity; I found discussing such incidents served as a form of therapy. I received reassurance that what I was experiencing was not the norm and this realisation led me to focus my Master’s writing on the issues of power and identity within the school hierarchy. My writing from this time served to illuminate the experience of powerlessness and its impact on identity. My research questions in this thesis concern the extent to which teachers experience their work as agentic and how choices relate to their school context. This particular journal entry exemplifies how the school context influences agency and how this can affect the sense of self as a teacher.

*Journal Entry 2 – June 2008: A conversation between myself and a member of staff during my NQT year.*

As with journal entry 1, this entry was written during my Master’s course, when my entries would often refer to the power relations within the school and the effect these had on myself and my own practice. I recorded events which I felt were significant in

terms of power and they provided data for an assignment which focused on the issues of power and identity within the confines of school hierarchy. I chose this extract for this thesis because in this instance the entry does not just detail my experiences. It is a record of a conversation that I was involved in; I wrote it up that afternoon, before leaving school, as I felt it was significant event. A staff member came to me very upset, explaining that she felt as though she was being coerced into accepting a job in the school but she was desperate to leave. I was interested in how the deputy head and head teacher were able to assert their power and, for the purpose of this thesis, it is a relevant example to illustrate that my NQT school context was extreme.

*Journal Entry 3a – October 2010: A reflection on a pupil progress meeting with my deputy headteacher.*

*Journal Entry 3b – November 2010: A reflection on steps taken in my classroom to ensure the pupil progress that was requested in journal entry 3a.*

These journal entries were written at the start of my Doctorate course and illustrated a shift from my Master's focus on power and hierarchy to a new ruler in the guise of performativity. During my Master's degree I focused on the enclosed hierarchy of the school, my angst lay with those who were visible. After completing the taught component of my doctoral studies, I recognised a shift in my thinking. I began to look out to the wider picture and the influences that may have affected senior management. I recognised the role performativity was playing within the education system and how this was affecting me and my agency as a teacher. I was required to collect data to inform an assignment, and therefore wrote these reflections to form part of my data for my first Doctorate assignment entitled 'Professionalism'. The purpose of the assignment was to interpret the meaning of professionalism and what it meant in terms of my own situation and self-perception. I was to explore the different discourses of professionalism in different educational settings and to endeavour to comprehend relationships and tensions between people and such discourses. I was instructed to be aware of the relationship between professional practice and other contextual issues and social structures. The process of writing the entries and completing the assignment made me consider the school context and how policies or social structures may have affected my understanding of professionalism and my practice; at that time there were

a lot of new school policies that were being implemented which, I felt, were changing my role as a teacher. I chose these entries because they are the first entries in which I portrayed myself as showing some resistance to authority, and how I responded to policy in the classroom.

*Journal Entry 4 – April 2011: A reflection on pupil progress, detailed in Journal Entry 3b in light of a new perspective*

This journal entry relates to Journal entry 3a and 3b but I have separated it because it illustrates an important shift in my thinking. When discussing journal entries 3a and 3b with my doctorate action learning set, I was asked a question which threw me and made me look at things from a different perspective. It was a hugely significant moment for me because looking at the situation in a different light made me acutely aware of the importance of perception and the influence an outsider can have on changing your views.

*Journal Entry 5a – September 2011: A reflection on my role as student mentor of an NQT, Adam.*

*Journal Entry 5b – September 2011: An overheard conversation about Adam between a staff member and the assistant head.*

*Journal Entry 5c – September 2011: A reflection on the conversation about Adam between the staff member and the assistant head.*

These entries are related since they all concern Adam, an NQT who I was mentoring. They were written during the early stages of my Doctorate course and I wrote them to inform an assignment entitled 'Intervening as Professionals'. The purpose was to evaluate an intervention within the workplace that had the purpose of bringing about change; the journal entries were written when I had experienced a challenging aspect of my role and was struggling with the nature of bringing about change. I was required to extend my knowledge of interventions as a practical activity and to compare this with other intervention models and strategies. Following on from themes in my previous assignments, I decided to discuss the tensions of power and identity within the role of a student mentor. This helped to further my thinking and critical analysis of situations; previously I had just been thinking about the effect policies and practice had on me and my pedagogical approach. This assignment made me consider how school policy, ethos

and expectations could affect the placement students and NQTs I was mentoring and in turn have an effect on their practice. I chose this extract because, on reflection, it highlighted aspects of myself I had not previously uncovered, before writing the thesis, the exploration of such journal entries allows me to compare my own NQT experience with that of someone else.

*Journal Entry 6a – November 2011: A reflection on levels and the validity of such levels.*

*Journal Entry 6b – November 2011: A conversation between a staff member, Lucy, and myself about levels*

These journal entries were written in the early stages of the taught component of my Doctorate and I used them to inform an assignment entitled ‘Research Methodology and Methods 2’. This required me to engage with, and gain, a deeper understanding of a range of methodological approaches used in educational research. I developed a more critical approach to discussing theory and, in turn, the repercussions this might have for a chosen methodology. Within it, I discussed a piece of my own research work involved with assessment; it encouraged me to look at the context of my school, the impact of my own subjectivity on my understanding of the context and the constraints this could place on my research strategies for this thesis. I chose these extracts for this thesis because they illustrated real life experiences of performativity in the classroom. In these journal entries, I portray a teacher, Lucy, reacting to the pressures of the need to be seen to raise attainment. She felt that the children in her class were awarded inflated levels of attainment in the summer term that made the previous teacher look good. She was then put under pressure to show pupil progress in the autumn assessments and voiced concern to me about how the results were going to reflect on her as a teacher. This incident made me question what this meant for her practice and the effect performativity has on a teacher’s pedagogy. These journal entries enable me to compare Lucy’s experience to my own and use my reflections to inform my interview analysis.

*Journal Entry 7 – December 2011: A reflection on a child in my class whose mother had missed their supervised contact time over the weekend.*

This journal entry was written during the taught component of my doctoral studies. I often wrote about this child because she was a cause for concern and demonstrated the conflict between caring for the whole child and the desire to achieve assessment targets.

This pupil had been taken away from her parents the previous year and placed in foster care; her father had improved his personal circumstances and during her time in my class, she was set to return to her father. She was still only able to see her mother during supervised visits and often her mother did not turn up. She was also struggling emotionally at having to leave her comfortable foster home and return to a place where she had previously not been cared for. I chose this entry for this thesis because it demonstrated conflict between how I wanted to act as a teacher, to care for the child, and what I was required to achieve in terms of levels. I want to review this entry and look for opportunities for agency.

*Journal Entry 8 – May 2015: A reflection on a PGCE student's experience and that of her university peers.*

This entry was written more recently than my other entries; the reflective process of my thesis research prompted me to write about my experiences mentoring a PGCE student. I had not planned to write a journal entry at this time but a conversation struck me as relevant to my thesis. My student, Katherine, was talking about restrictions on practice other than targets and assessment; she spoke about the influence of the class teacher over her peers and how some students were finding working with their class teacher restrictive and difficult. Previously, I had given performativity credit for being all consuming within the classroom and the main restriction on agency, so this new perspective was of interest. Writing this journal entry made me reflect on my influence over others as a student mentor.

### *Interviews – participants and themes*

The research interview is a widely used data collection method in qualitative research (Sandy and Dumay:2011). The interviews I conducted served to inform my own understanding of teacher agency and how other teachers experienced their role as agentic. Interviews allowed me to question other teachers who had experienced schools different to mine and were at different stages of their careers; thus, imparting new knowledge on a shared teaching context (Vale, 2007). The exploration of my 'Situational I's' coloured my reflections on the interviews; after analysing the interviews, I returned to my journal entries and examined my perspective, at the time, more closely. The

interviews were a vital part of my data collection and necessary for me to revisit past experiences with a different perspective (Vale, 2007). Critics of interviews as a method, argue that there are risks of inaccuracy and that the meanings of certain situations are 'negotiated by the actors involved' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018:25). I acknowledge that the interviewees have told their story and their version of events; my concern is understanding their perceptions and how their experience of teacher agency has allowed me to view my own experiences in a different light.

Hannabuss provided a guide to interview technique which I found useful during the interview process:

- Establishing rapport
- Keeping discussion going
- Asking questions which avoid yes/no answers
- Avoiding jargon and abstraction
- Avoiding double negatives and loaded expressions
- Knowing when not to interrupt and even letting silence work for you
- Being non judgemental
- Knowing how to focus and pace the interview

(Hannabuss, 1996:27)

The above provided a useful reminder that there may be occasions when interviewees were silent or paused to gather their thoughts. I was mindful throughout the interviews not to interrupt but at the same time to ensure that there was sense of pace and that the interview did not slow or become too stale (Ten Have, 2011). I opted for a semi-structured interview approach:

thus the focus is on the interview guide incorporating a series of broad themes to be covered during the interview to help direct the conversation toward the topics and issues about which the interviewers want to learn' (Sandy and Dumay, 2011:246)

The themes that I wanted to explore in relation to my research questions concerned respondents' experiences of agency in their work and what was important to them as a teacher. Ball draws largely on performativity and issues of assessment- and target-

driven policies when discussing restrictions on teacher agency; my journal entries reflected this and it was these themes, therefore, that I used in my overall interview design. It would not have been suitable for me to ask the same questions to a teacher at the beginning of their career and to a teacher at a later point in their career, (Cohen et al:2018) so I opted for a semi structured interview based on themes, listed below, rather than specific questions.

- Stage of their career
- Influence on practice
- Experience of assessment/targets
- What/how has their agency been affected

The flexibility of this interview structure also appealed in that it 'enable[d] interviewees to provide responses in their own terms and in the way that they think and use language' (Sandy and Dumay, 2011:246). It was imperative that respondents were able to phrase and speak about topics in their own style of discourse. Sandy and Dumay continue by stating the semi structured interview is popular due to 'its basis in human conversation' (2011:246) and that:

It proves to be especially valuable if the researchers are to understand the way the interviewees perceive the social world under study. (2011:246)

It is this social world which I investigated; the relationships within it and the choices that the actors were able to make or that restricted them, what agency looked like and where it was to be found.

I interviewed four other primary school teachers for the study, as described in Table 5. My aim was to gain a deeper understanding about my questions concerning teacher agency, and the scope for choice and decision making within the classroom.

Name	Relationship to me	Number of years working as a teacher at time of interview	Current Role	Date interviewed
Thea	Doctoral student	20 years	Supply teacher	July 2014
Victoria	Doctoral student	13 years	Headteacher	July 2014
Harriet	Shared a previous placement	6 years	Part time teacher (previously full time)	September 2014
Anna	A PGCE student in my current school but I was not the mentor during her placement	1 year placement	PGCE student (end of second placement)	June 2014

*Table 5 List of interview participants*

Interviewees were selected in order to cover a range of teaching experiences, since I wanted to ensure I had a selection of teachers at different points in their career. The focus was not on interviewing a large number of teachers, but a focused few that would elicit data-rich interviews. As I wanted to investigate the relationships between various restrictions and potential windows for agency and different roles, interviewees were selected from different schools. I recruited them through various routes: Thea, a supply teacher, and Victoria, a head teacher, were known to me through my university doctoral studies; both were unconnected to my place of work and were willing to speak about their experiences. Harriet and I had worked in the same school during a previous student placement; she had since moved to another part of the country and was now part time, providing another point of comparison to the other interviewees. Anna, a PGCE student, had been on placement at my current school but I was not her mentor. I invited her to interview her after her placement had finished, to ensure that she would be able to speak freely about her experience, with no concerns about being judged in terms of her performance on the placement; her mentor had completed her report at the time Anna was invited to interview, so she knew any interview comments were occurring after any professional correspondence on her practice.

Hannabuss commented on the importance of the relationship of the researcher and the respondent in that it was 'crucial to the success of the interview' (1996). I specifically chose respondents I had good relationships with, and avoided those where power



relations may have particularly come into play (Shah,2004). For example, I also interviewed my current head teacher, but after careful consideration about the power relationships that could be at play, I decided to discount his interview. Although he offered some interesting insights, there was a possibility that, as my employer, he may not have felt as though he could speak as freely as he might have done with an outsider. In this instance, I was also putting myself in a vulnerable position in conducting the interview and any use of the data could easily have been identified by him and potentially alter my relationship with him as an employee. I also need to acknowledge Anna's position, although her placement was completed, she was in a less powerful position and a less experienced teacher; I cannot discount that this might have affected her answers and I am aware of the possible constraints her position may have had on her answers. Confidentiality and anonymity was promised to all participants (Appendix A).

### Ethical Considerations

Sandy and Dumay (2011) identify four specific ethical factors which deserve attention and thought in the research process; impose no harm, relationship-based ethics, disclosure of research intent, and right to privacy and confidentiality. I followed Manchester Metropolitan University ethical guidelines in order to pursue these considerations.

#### Impose no harm

No interviewee was coerced into taking part; each respondent was invited to interview and informed about the research process and my role in collecting the data. I explained I was writing a thesis for a Doctorate course and an example of the letter can be found in the appendices (Appendix A). Each participant was informed via letter, prior to interview, that they would be recorded using a Dictaphone and that the interview would be transcribed; consent forms were signed prior to interviews. Respondents were informed that a copy of the transcript, before its use as data, would be available for them should they wish to view a copy before submission. They were also informed that once the final draft of the thesis had been submitted and accepted, the transcript and the recording would be deleted. Interviewees were informed that they had the option

to opt out of the research process at any point without the need to explain why and that they could freely decline to answer any questions during the interview (Sandy and Durmay, 2011).

#### Relationship-based ethics

As noted earlier, I discounted an original interview with my current head teacher on the basis of the power relations that might have arisen. I also thought carefully about the power implications with Anna's interview; since she was a relatively inexperienced teacher on placement within my school, I waited until after her placement had finished to invite her for interview, she no longer worked there before conducting the interview or when invited. I did not want her to feel as though the interview was part of her practice or that it would inform my judgement on her performance within the school. In doing so I felt that I had taken what steps I could so as not to 'unduly influence the responses of the interviewee' (Sandy and Durmay, 2011:253).

#### Disclosure of research intent

'A fundamental balance needs to be struck between interviewer and interviewee in terms of how much about the study's intent should be disclosed by the interviewer' (Sandy and Durmay, 2011:253)

In Mercer's (2007) account of her experience during insider research, she explains that she decided not to reveal the specifics of her research focus, mainly because she was working within her research field and with those she was interviewing. As I was not working with any of the respondents, I felt that I was able to give a brief overview; I explained that I was investigating teacher agency, but I did not expand on what my interpretations of agency were, nor did I give examples of what the assertion of agency may look like. I gave no opinions before, during or after the interview about my research topic as I wanted to stay neutral as far as possible, and did not want respondents to feel judged in any way when describing their experiences.

#### Right to privacy and confidentiality

Every interviewee was assured of their right to privacy and confidentiality. Interviews took place in a location of their choice, away from their place of work; two of the

interviews were conducted in the respondent's home. This meant that it was not a neutral location, but one where I felt that the interviewee would feel most comfortable and be willing to speak freely without concern of being overheard by colleagues. Respondents were given the option of anonymity and all names in this thesis are pseudonyms. No specific locations are mentioned in relation to respondents' particular places of work, and schools are not named. As Shaw (2003) notes, a potential dilemma in ensuring a respondent's right to privacy can arise in some circumstances, for example, 'blatant incompetence by a professional practitioner' (2003:16). If one of my interviewees had alerted me to a matter of child protection or confided that they were in some way unfit to teach, this would have called into question their right to privacy; I would have been obliged to report any serious concerns that may affect any person's safety or well-being to the relevant authorities. Fortunately, no such dilemmas presented themselves during the course of my research, meaning I was able to maintain my respondents' rights to confidentiality.

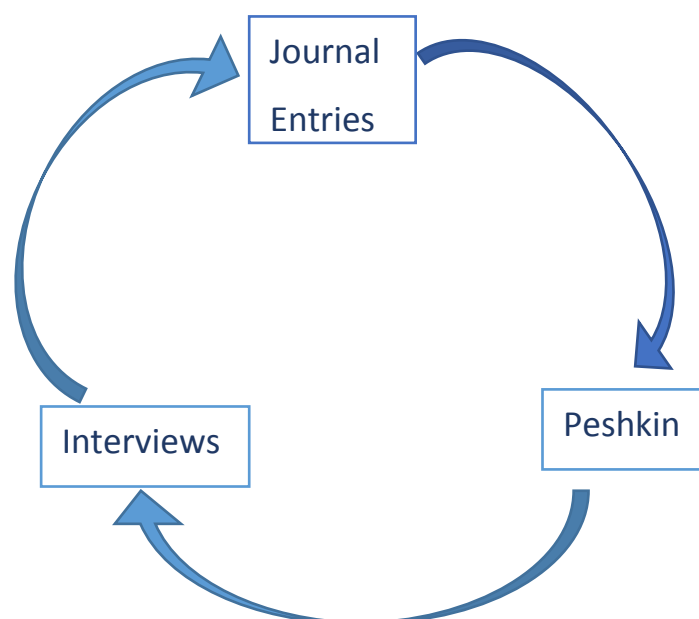
#### [Ethical dilemmas relating to the use of journal entries](#)

Some ethical dilemmas presented themselves concerning the use of journal entries. Firstly, it is important to ensure the anonymity of anyone discussed in my journals, and the confidentiality of what they said or did. At the time of writing such entries, I asked those I wrote about for permission to include them in my university work; my colleagues and head teachers were aware of my studies and gave written consent to include anonymised incidents from my school context in my university writing (Appendix B). My presentation of the journal entries within this thesis ensures that no colleague's name has been used or alluded to and I have not mentioned any names of schools or the location of such schools in the country. As previously mentioned, some entries are records of conversations, written from memory and from my own perspective. They are treated as such in my analysis. Ellis et al. suggest that one of the potential problems with insider research is that 'in using personal experience, auto ethnographers are thought to not only use supposedly biased data but are also navel gazers' (2011:355). Recognising this, I have already highlighted that an explicit focus on my subjectivity in this thesis has entailed being conscious of any bias in my thoughts or opinions, and addressing this in my analysis. In addition, I have looked to other sources of data, in the

form of interviews with other teachers, to inform my analysis and be reflexive. In doing so I have endeavoured to conduct research that is 'theoretical, and analytical and emotional, therapeutic and inclusive of personal and social phenomena' (Ellis et al., 2011:355).

### Data analysis

The journal entries and interviews are not treated as separate data for analysis, both inform each other and add to the depth of understanding gained from using both sources. The journal entries provide an inside view, which I now look at from the outside, through the lens of Peshkin's writing and my 'Situational I's'. Such insights then compare and colour reflections on the interviews which prompts a return to the journal entries and a closer examination of my perspective.



*Figure 1 The data analysis process*

This was an oscillating process by which both sets of data informed and encouraged a deeper analysis of each other, as illustrated in Figure 1. This was not simply a static motion of the insider looking to the outside but a multi layered approach to gain a deeper level of analysis. Ellis et al. state that:

Autoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality and the researcher's influence on

research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they do not exist.  
(2011:346)

This idea aids my research design process; the exposure of my subjectivity was a key part of my analysis, since I used it to inform my thesis rather than hide it. My subjectivity forms the basis of my story and the discovery of new insights and perspectives. Ellis et al. continue that autoethnographers:

Must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders. To accomplish this might require comparing and contrasting experience against existing research. (2011:348)

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, journal entries detail my 'cultural experience', I intertwine these with 'comparing and contrasting' links with my interview data.

The aforementioned themes for the semi structured interview were used to guide the interviews; after reading and reflecting on the interviews and journal entries, I noted that other themes became apparent in relation to the assertion of agency within the classroom. I took a thematic approach to the analysis; when transcribing the interviews, I looked for common words, contexts and concerns; these were noted down and key words were recorded to ascertain the frequency of certain topics. This then drove the organisation of my data analysis and the resulting themes were, context of the school/school ethos; creativity versus performativity; and the personal influence on practice. I used these themes and my 'Situational I's' to explore my journal entries. For example, I compare experiences of assessment and I pick out similarities and in both context, emotion and the assertion of agency. The comparison and contrast of journal entries and interviews provides different perspectives, an insider's and an outsider's narrative; in this sense the narrative is:

More than a tool to collect or disseminate information; it is the methodology as the researcher, through narrative, uncovers the data. (Lyle, 2009:295)

The journal entries were the starting point for my narrative; I reflected on them through Peshkin's lens, identifying my 'Situational Identities' and used them to build stories around my interviews. After examining the interviews, I then returned to my journal entries, looking for ways in which my thinking had gained new insights. I looked from the inside to the outside but also allowed the outside to shine new light on my insider perspective. It is this notion that I weave throughout my research and analysis; looking to myself, reflecting, then looking to the outsider to gain a different view for further reflection.

Just as an outsider altered my perspective in journal entry 4, I use the interviews as a reflexive tool to gain further insights about myself. I step away from being the insider and use my new-found awareness to reflect on my journal entries as an outsider. I took a reflective approach to the interviews and realised that 'the interview transcript is not a mirror of reality but rather a text that needs to be subjectively evaluated' (Sandy and Dumay, 2011:256). This realisation came after exploring my own subjectivity, I was acutely aware that each interviewee would also be influenced by their own contexts and epistemology; therefore, I looked for the tensions and contradictions within the interviews and journal entries and returned explicitly to the 'Situational Identities' in the second part of my analysis. My subjectivity formed an important part of my analysis; after the initial thematic analysis of the interviews and journal entries, I used the exploration of my subjectivity to delve into a deeper understanding of the interview data. To do this, I look from the inside, at myself and my 'Situational I's' out to the interviews and examine the situations that allow an assertion of agency and consider what that looks like. I question what it was within each of these 'Situational Is' that afforded a sense of agency and what made one context potentially more agentic than another.

In response to my research questions, this chapter has given a description of the methodological and theoretical positions which have underpinned my research. Peshkin's notions on subjectivity were introduced and I explored my own subjectivity by identifying my 'Situational I's' and the influences which have aided their formation. My reasoning for autoethnographic research was discussed and I explained the link between Peshkin's views on subjectivity and conducting such research. Ethical dilemmas were

considered within my research and discussed my methods for data collection. The interviewees were introduced, and I discussed how the journal entries and interviews were not analysed separately but informed each other thus adding to the depth of knowledge gained throughout the analysis. The next chapter introduces the first stage of the analysis. It is organised by the themes elicited in the initial thematic analysis, weaving the journal entries and interviews together to gain a deeper insight into the mechanisms of teacher agency.

## Chapter 4 – Analysis: A View from the Inside

The theme of this thesis is looking from the inside to the outside and this is reflected in my data analysis. The chapter is structured into three sections using themes emerging from the interviews and journal entries: context of the school/school ethos; creativity versus performativity; and the personal influence on practice. I begin each section by exploring my journal entries, commenting on my thoughts and perceptions of my positionality at that time, and reflecting on whether and how that perception has altered. I then look to the interviews and use them as an outsider's voice to further inform my thinking. I look for the contradictions and tensions within the interviews and journal entries and note how and where indications of agency appear. I explore how teachers' values connect to their subjectivity as teachers and their sense of agency, and consider whether agency can only appear when their beliefs and values are recognised within their contexts.

### The Context of the School/School Ethos

In the previous chapter, I explored my professional subjectivity and identified the Situational I's which were apparent in different contexts. Newly aware of the influence that the context of the school has on the formation of one's situational identity, I first re-examine my journal entries, noting transformation in my role, from being the one who felt 'enforced' within a school's practices, to the enforcer of the school's norm within a different context. The following extract is from a journal entry written in my NQT year, in which I am reflecting on an incident that had affected me that day. As described in the methodology, my Master's writing focused on power relationships within school; the way in which the deputy head asserted her authority both terrified and interested me at the same time. It was often the unsaid that bore more threat and continued to dominate me during my time at the school:

#### Journal Entry 1

I don't really know what to think about today, but I do not feel actions taken were necessary and I feel they were performed in a manner meant to intimidate. During an afternoon history lesson Miss \_\_\_\_ (deputy head) came into my classroom unannounced and watched me from the door. I stopped speaking to



my class and looked at her expectantly, thinking she had something to say. She answered my questioning expression with, 'Carry on, I've just come in for a look.'

My Situational Identity here is 'Enforced I'. From the beginning of the extract, feelings of confusion and intimidation are clear; my use of the passive voice is indicative of the fact I feel that I am being 'done to'. The act of a member of senior leadership popping their head through the door in the middle of a lesson, is not, in itself, intimidating; but within the context of a highly prescriptive school, being relatively inexperienced as an NQT, and the way in which this member of staff usually conducted herself amongst the staff, this situation held more gravitas than might appear. It echoes Foucault's notion of 'disciplinary power' (1979); I was 'being constantly seen' through impromptu lesson observations. It was the deputy head's right as my superior and in line with the school's 'open door policy' that I was 'always being able to be seen', but this provoked a feeling of alarm and concern that I had not been 'maintain[ing] the disciplines' (Foucault, 1979):

#### [Journal entry 1](#)

I immediately began to panic, had I remembered to put dates on all my lesson plans? Were they in the right order? Slowly she flicked through my files and made notes on a piece of paper she was carrying with her.

As 'Enforced I' my writing style reflects the horror that I felt at that time; writing about it and discussing such incidents with my Master's action set gave me an outlet and it allowed time for me to reflect and to gain a sense of perspective. I felt threatened; it was the unknown and the unsaid that unnerved me; she was clearly writing about me and my files, but this was not shared with me, nor was the purpose of her visit. As is evident from the extract, I was left questioning my practice; often, such observations did not result in a follow up meeting, leaving the questions I had unanswered and me left to wonder and question my practice. Even though I was an NQT, I knew from discussion with my action set and other teachers that this was not the norm, but as an NQT in an unfamiliar setting, I did not have the confidence to speak out. It seemed silly, as an NQT, to complain about lesson observations and file checks, but it was the manner in which it was carried out that made me feel so constrained and anxious. Ball (2011) argues that although the primary focus of surveillance is on the students and the data which they produce, the teacher is drawn into this surveillance because they drive the

system which produces the student's results. This journal entry illustrates Ball's argument and provides a clear example of teacher surveillance, something which I experienced many times within that school context as 'Enforced I'. The prescriptive nature of the school meant that paperwork was required to be checked weekly, books scrutinised regularly, and impromptu lesson observations carried out frequently. In this particular context I felt that 'compliance [was] key' (Ball et al, 2011a:613) but there were many factors which led to this; I was in my NQT year, I had very limited teaching experience, and as it was my first teaching practice this was the norm for me. Although I did not like it, my 'Historical I', in terms of my 'Pleasing I' and 'Worker I', meant I was compliant.

Moving to a different school context at my second school, a different Situational I, 'Finding Pedagogy I', revealed a significant move from the enforced to the enforcer, something I had not considered before revisiting the journal entries and the exploration of my situational identities. I was the student mentor at the school which meant overseeing the NQTs. One of my early doctoral assignments was focused on my role as student mentor and therefore I recorded any incidents which I felt were relevant for discussion in my action set. It was September and NQT Adam's classroom was lacking in displays, prompting the head teacher to tell me to speak to him and ensure displays were swiftly put up.

#### Journal Entry 5a

The head has told me that I need to speak to [Adam] and get his room sorted by Monday, 'Even if he has to stay after school to do it.' Part of me feels bad for having to speak to him about it, but another part of me feels that really his room should have been a priority over the summer holidays, surely, he would want to impress coming to a new school?

As discussed in Chapter 3, at this point in my career, aside from the challenges of pupil behaviour, I was more content within the school context and felt more trusted and appreciated than in my previous post. Reflecting on this entry now, there were already aspects of school life that prompted my 'Target Driven I'. Learning walks were becoming more frequent and the likelihood of an Ofsted visit was drawing closer. I understood the credence given to displays within the school and it could be argued that I was so

embedded within this school culture that I assumed that an NQT, with limited school experience, would instinctively know this. In the extract I judge Adam by the school's requirement's and look down upon his empty classroom walls; I question his lack of savviness, he was starting at a new school and yet his classroom looked bare, first impressions did not look good. It transpired that the reason he had left walls blank was because he wanted to use the children's work to create displays; it was the beginning of term so there was no work to put up yet. Despite being a reasonable argument, it went against the ethos of the school in terms of what was expected from displays. After our discussion, Adam was made privy to 'a new set of incentives and disciplines and a new set of roles, positions and identities' (Ball, 2008:42) in his position in the school. He was not permitted to walk outside of these disciplines and as student mentor I was to help guide him into the mould that would fit the context of the school.

Reflecting on this incident now, certain tensions are apparent in my role as the enforcer. I question why I had not asked Adam to put his displays up before being asked to speak to him. As a student mentor it was my job to guide and to inform the NQTs of the requirements of the school, so why had I not done this without prompting? Returning to journal entry 1, my time as 'Enforced I' was a very unhappy one, and it is possible that, subconsciously, I was almost afraid to take on this role, for fear of making someone else feel as restrained as I did. I was threatened by the deputy head's intrusion into my classroom, it was my teaching space, yet I never felt as though I was able to own it. It is quite telling that I do not show any regret for not telling him about his lack of displays sooner, instead 'I feel bad' about having to speak to him and that the head teacher had to ask me to be the enforcer. I was not willing to make an intrusion into his classroom and I am apologetic for my role. In the last sentence I try to justify my position, perhaps as a way of making myself feel better that I was about to influence his practice, to pacify my guilt at being the enforcer.

There was a second incident with Adam a month into the term. I recorded a conversation, from memory, that I was privy to in the staffroom about a lesson that Adam had taught. He had covered the staircase in shredded paper, to make it look like a snowy mountain, against the advice of the assistant head, who had already told him not to:

### Journal Entry 5b

**Assistant head:** I can't believe what NQT A has been doing, I just walked through his classroom and the entire floor is covered in shredded paper which is meant to be snow! Then he put it all down that stairs, so it could be a snowy mountain. I mean who on earth does he think is going to clear it up?!

**Teacher:** What's happening now?

**Assistant head:** I told him to clear it up, I told him in the first place not to put it on the stairs and he completely ignored me, so I've given him a Hoover and he can sort it out.

**Teacher:** It's a bit dangerous asking them to walk upstairs with paper all over them, you can just imagine the fuss if one of them fell.

**Assistant head:** Exactly! It's absurd. At least it's being cleared up before they come in.

In Chapter 2 I discussed Day et al.'s paper exploring the complex nature of establishing teacher identity within the abundance of policy and school discourse and the 'costs for teachers' (2006:610) of establishing their agency. This is relevant to the following journal entry because in this incident, I believe that Adam was trying to assert a creative identity as a teacher and this was immediately quashed by the assistant head. I reflected on the situation later that evening:

### Journal Entry 5c

I felt slightly torn today with [Adam], he had told Assistant head about an English lesson he had planned on teaching and had wanted to create the scene for the children. Assistant head had told him not to create the snow scene on the stairs but he went ahead. Assistant head was furious and made him clean it up. On the one hand I do feel he should have listened to her but I also understand that his intention was to create an engaging lesson for the children.

Once again, tensions within my role as the enforcer are apparent; my opening words 'I felt slightly torn' instantly illustrate the conflict that I felt between allowing Adam to be creative and having freedom in his practice, and adhering to senior leadership demands.

Part of my 'Historical I' is my 'Pleasing I'; complying with authority is something that I do, but this extract shows that it is not without feelings of conflict or guilt. I portray Adam as displaying agency within this extract; he asserted his agency in this situation by going against the advice of the assistant head and this could be considered as the 'cost' of his agency. The assertion of his agency was not in retaliation to policy, but to the assistant head. It could also be viewed, however, that the assistant head is symbolic of policy; it is senior members of staff who play a part in the implementation and adherence of school policies. In this case the individual held authority meaning the 'cost' of asserting Adam's agency also resulted in the children not seeing the 'snowy mountain' as he was forced to clear it up.

Reflection on such journal entries provides further insights into my own subjectivity; the strong reaction of the assistant head accentuates my reluctance as an enforcer. In the previous journal entry, I did not act as an enforcer until told to do so by the head teacher; in stark contrast, the assistant head had already 'told him in the first place not to' create the snowy mountain stairway. Instead of telling Adam what he should be doing, in this instance, she tells him he must not do what he wants to do. Although there is a certain amount of disempowerment within this situation, there is also a strong display of agency. Adam saw himself as a creative practitioner and put his values and beliefs above the advice from senior leadership. On this occasion, Adam's risk was not wholly successful, but he was able to keep the 'snow' in his classroom, so it could be argued that a small part of the battle had been won. This example shows a different type of teacher than the one described by Ball; Adam was not 'responsive to external requirements' (2003:222), he purposely ignored them. It could be suggested that Adam was simply so new that he had not yet realised his place; and as a reluctant enforcer who did not inform him of the school's 'incentives and disciplines' (Ball, 2008), could part of the blame lie with me? Being so concerned about intruding on another teacher's practice, did I inadvertently hinder his introduction to the school?

Exploring Adam's experience as an NQT led me to reflect on the differences between mine and his NQT experiences. It is evident from my journal entries that I was not like him as an NQT; thanks to my 'Pleasing I', I was much more compliant. Partly this has to do with the context, in that the deputy head at my first school was extremely forceful -

in conversations with other staff members, it transpired that it was not only me who felt coerced. I feel that it is important to address this because I have already stated that part of my Intrinsic I is my compliant nature; on reflection on other journal entries, I can see that this was not the only factor at play and that the context was hugely significant. In the following journal entry, I wrote about a conversation with another staff member, Naomi, who had wanted to leave the school once her probation year had ended at the end of July. Her job was being advertised and it had been hinted by the deputy head that she should apply, but she did not want to and was desperate to leave. I wrote about it because I felt it was a significant incident about power relations within the school, a topic of my Master's study:

### Journal Entry 2

I'm feeling confused about events today and wanted to record them in a journal entry. Naomi is a member of staff who joined the school on a one year contract and she decided due to the pressures and general treatment of staff in the school she wanted to resign. We thought that would mean three of us leaving this year and we are all more than a little happy about it.

**N:** \_\_\_\_ came in to my classroom at the end of the school day visibly upset.

**Me:** what's the matter?

**N:** got called in to the head's office with Maude (deputy head) about the job.

**Me:** Why? What about it? They can't force you to apply for it if you don't want it.

**N:** I know, but they said that they were extending the closing date for me and could do my interview next week.

**Me:** What did you say? Didn't you just say you weren't applying?

**N:** I couldn't, they said they could just take my previous application form and that I could have the interview next week.

**Me:** but you don't want a job here.

**N:** (crying) I know but I don't know what to do, it's like they won't accept me not wanting it.

Once again, it is not what was said that was threatening; the way in which this school was run was very manipulative and coercion was woven into the discourse of the school. During my time as 'Enforced I', I came to an understanding that the incidents themselves were not a cause for complaint, it was more the way in which they were carried out. For example, in this instance it could be brushed off that senior management were keen to give a temporary member of staff a full-time contract, they were doing her a favour. However, having worked in that context and knowing the individuals it was more complex than that. Examining this incident in closer detail, the offer is not an offer, more a command; Naomi tells me that the interview date is the following week and an assumption is made that she will attend. Choice in the form of physically applying for the job by filling in an application form is also removed, as they will use the previous form. Naomi knows that she does not want a job at the school but is positioned in such a way that she feels that she does not have the freedom to say this; she does not tell them that she does not want to apply for the job; her account suggests that assumptions about her application constricted her voice.

Having worked in such an unusually constricted environment, it is not wholly surprising that my approach to my NQT year was different from Adam's; I spent a lot of time being scared and I'm still not sure of what. The unknown was used to breed anxiousness and compliance; I did not know what was thought of me, I did not know if what I was doing was right and I did not know what would happen if I did something wrong. In contrast, in my portrayal of Adam, he stands up to authority; he seems unafraid of conflict, his decision to go against the assistant head actively invited it, and he faces the consequences and clears up the 'snowy mountain' when told. Although Adam's encounter with the assistant head constrains him, in comparing our experiences I can see that Adam knows where he stands. He's been explicitly told what not to do and what the consequences are, there is not the complex subtext of the unsaid which was used as a mechanism of control in my NQT placement. Perhaps this allows for more agency, in that in knowing what the costs are, Adam was able to assess whether the risk was worth it. In my situation the costs and threats were silent, meaning I could not navigate into

the spaces that lay within the tensions and conflicts of my practice, because I did not know where the boundaries were set.

I was already aware that I complied with authority; 'Pleasing I' and 'Worker I' are part of my 'Historical I', but in reflection on the journal entries a conflict between creativity and authority is also made apparent. Adam stands up for his creative beliefs whereas I 'feel torn'; I recognise the importance of creativity, 'I understand that his intention was to create an engaging lesson for the children' but this goes against my 'Historical I's' desire to please authority. Having seen part of Ball's depiction of a teacher in myself and a contrast in Adam's willingness to assert his creativity, I was prompted to question the effect school management had on teachers. I explored this issue further within the interviews.

Victoria, a head teacher, provides an insight into how the processes that caused me to comply, as an NQT worked. She begins her interview by stating that working in deprived areas influenced her choice in where she wanted to work:

I realised that my strengths lay in working with children with some difficulties in terms of behaviour, with some difficult families where there's high deprivation and so that's why I chose to work in the school where I am now.

Victoria demonstrates a strong sense of agency here; she states her strengths confidently and speaks of choice, she 'chose' to work at the school she is head of. In contrast to my NQT experiences as depicted in my journal entries, we can see that Victoria presents an alternative perspective on the development of the school context and ethos and the effect on its teachers. As a head teacher, this is to be expected:

When I do walk around my school...there's a definite way of working and for a head that's brilliant because I think that adds to the ethos of your school.

Initially this suggests a uniqueness, the school runs in a way that Victoria, as a head teacher, has helped to form; this continues as she discusses what may influence a new member of staff at her school:

The policies that we have, because that really defines how we manage behaviour. It defines how we mark, how we plan.



It resonates with my journal entries about Adam's experiences as an NQT; there were clear 'way[s] of working' within his school and he was not allowed to work in a way that he had chosen.

Victoria's use of language is indicative of the sense of autonomy she feels over these policies. She uses 'we' five times and there is no sense of her being 'done to', she is in control. This is a contrast to the previous journal entries where Adam, Naomi and I are all being put upon and constrained. In comparison, when Victoria asserts her agency, the teacher's agency is reduced. These policies are written in the school by senior management and therefore help to form the school's individuality but in accordance with government policy. The effect that she then describes this having on a new member of staff offers less freedom to the teachers within her school, something that I note Adam experienced:

It doesn't matter if they want to plan in a different way, they've got to plan in the way that we've set up as a school.

Adam was not allowed to teach in the way that he wanted to; it did not matter that he wanted to be creative and different, he had to adhere, in part, to the assistant head's wishes. Here, just like Adam, we see the removal of choice from new staff members, which is perhaps one of the most significant factors in the assertion of agency for teachers within her school. Victoria clearly states that the choice to plan in a different way is not allowed, that it 'doesn't matter'; this illustrates Ball et al.'s argument that 'there is little or no space for alternative interpretations of policy' (2011a:613). In the removal of choice from staff members, Victoria's identity as a head teacher becomes more pronounced; she has ownership of these policies and ensures that those who work within her school comply with them. Here, she recognises this and reflects on the issues of teacher identity and the school context:

I guess you could question, is that taking away their own personal identity and their own pedagogical beliefs? Because they are being told to teach in a particular way which comes under the umbrella of a particular school. And getting new staff in, even new experienced staff, you can tell that that's the case because they've been told how to do something in their previous school. They've

been teaching for seven years, they come into a new school and they feel like an NQT again...because somebody is telling them to do it differently, and what they did in their previous school doesn't quite fit into the ethos of the new school and this is the way we do it here.

Interestingly, Victoria immediately links personal identity with pedagogical beliefs, suggesting the removal of one follows the other. If I apply her notions to the previous journal entries, have the teacher's personal identities been taken away with the imposition of school policy? Reflecting now on Adam and my experience as student mentor and 'Target Driven I', there are clear conflicts between my desire to allow him to be creative and the need to comply with senior management. The fact that there are tensions suggests that my identity has not been fully removed. Similarly, Adam went against the grain and was reprimanded for wanting to put up his classroom displays after the start of term; this did not prevent him trying to assert his creativity, explicitly going against the assistant head's wishes. In this sense, both Adam and my personal identities are not taken away; they may be oppressed but there is still evidence within the tensions that make them visible.

It is not completely clear where Victoria positions herself within the above passage; it could be viewed that she is seeing herself as one of these teachers and talking from experience, or she could be commenting on herself enforcing her school's way of being. Victoria appears to be speaking about her own experience as a head, 'getting new staff in, even new experienced staff, you can tell that that's the case'. Her use of 'you' suggests that as a head she has experienced this before and it is a recurring event, and links with previous comments about new staff having to adhere to new ways of planning. There's a slight distancing from being the person or authority that enforces new teaching practices with her use of 'somebody' rather than 'you', but she reverts to being the authority once more at the end of the passage with 'this is the way we do it here', echoing her use of 'we' from her thoughts on policy. Victoria's account of being a teacher in her school is one where teachers are described as having no choice; her teachers are 'told' what to do and, as Ball (2003) suggests, there is an acknowledgement that a teacher's beliefs must be forfeited in exchange for acceptance within the school, 'beliefs are no longer important – it is the output that counts' (2003:223). She continues

by echoing Ball's statement 'the neo-liberal subject is malleable rather than committed' (2013:139).

It's almost as though they don't have the freedom to explore and become a good teacher within their own merit. They're actually moulded into a particular way...of being.

There are similarities in what Victoria says and what has been illustrated in the journal entries so far. As 'Enforced I', I did not have 'the freedom to explore': I was ruled by paper work and lesson observations, too inexperienced and afraid to attempt to explore my pedagogy. Adam tried to explore and do things his own way, but he was restricted by what senior management deemed appropriate. In this passage, Victoria has moved away from speaking about her school, to schools in general; she is assuming that all schools operate in the same manner and, that with each new school setting, teachers are moulded into a new way of being. This concurs with my exploration of the journal entries so far, and in some respect this reflects Peshkin's notion of 'Situational Identity'. However, it is missing the idea of an intrinsic sense of being, that the teacher is able to also bring part of their own identity and experience to that school context, something that I have noted in both mine and Adam's behaviour. Victoria speaks about the influence of government policy, which will be discussed at a later point within this chapter, but in terms of her thoughts on the school context, and what she refers to as school ethos, she appears to give more credence to senior management in terms of their power. The use of 'we' and 'they' when she discusses the implementation of policy gives a sense of 'us' and 'them'; not as Ball's teachers versus policy makers, but staff, or new staff, versus senior management. Within Victoria's account, she identifies elements of choice within her school but describes it as resting within senior management and their influence on policy and school practice, 'it defines how we mark, how we plan'. As a head teacher, she is speaking from a position of authority, so it is important that another perspective of school life is examined from someone who is not part of the school's decision-making process.

In contrast to Victoria, Harriet is a teacher who has had no managerial experience and has worked in two different schools. Harriet speaks about the restrictions during her NQT year in a negative way:

There was no wriggle room at all and every single piece of paperwork had to be in and every single subject had to be planned for. There was a massive paper trail and everything had to be checked.

Harriet speaks in the passive voice and there is repetition of the phrase 'had to'; there are no clear subjects in the speech, the actors aren't named or even alluded to. Her style echoes a sense of being 'done to' and highlights a sense of restriction with phrases such as, 'no wriggle room at all'. There are clear similarities between Harriet's experiences and my time as 'Enforced I'; her comment, 'everything had to be checked' conjures up images of my deputy head 'checking' my classroom on her impromptu visits. The feeling that Harriet had 'no wriggle room' also alludes to feelings of constraint and oppression. In this passage she appears to be more similar to my 'Enforced I' than Adam; phrases such as 'had to be in' and 'had to be planned for' suggests that she did not veer away from authority and that she handed in and planned her teaching as she was told.

Like Victoria, Harriet also remarks on the perceived uniqueness of her current school - 'we work differently to other schools' - but in contrast to Victoria's comments about the restriction this has on teachers within the school, Harriet's experience is one which she feels affords her more control:

We have self-reflection time every other week where we go in and talk to the deputy about what we need to do, so it's not dictated to us.

There's a slight conflict in Harriet's statement; on one hand she is saying that she is not being 'dictated to' but on the other she is referring to speaking to a member of senior management about what she needs to do at a set time. What is important is how Harriet perceives it and as her following statements show, Harriet sees this reflection time as a positive part of school discourse. For example, in a sharp contrast to Victoria's comments that 'as a head [I] go in. I'll be saying, this is how I want you to do it in this school', Harriet states that:

Management have recognised that telling people what to do is not the answer...It's people finding their own way which gives you... your own ownership of your practice.

Harriet does not depict herself as being removed from her sense of self; rather, she feels she is given time to explore the self in terms of her pedagogy and how she will respond to situations during self-reflection time. During my time as 'Enforced I', I was in a school where I was constantly being told 'what to do'; in Harriet's story she has the sense that she is not being told what to do. In her depiction of the school context, the teacher is afforded a greater sense of autonomy; although still having to adhere to the restrictions of performativity, Harriet describes herself and her colleagues as being in control - 'you feel in control of the process'. As a head and an enforcer of policy, Victoria's perceptions in her previous passage contradict this; with reference to new staff she states, 'they are told to teach in a particular way'. Therefore, it is questionable whether the sense of autonomy is simply a 'sense of' or whether it is actual autonomy. It could be argued that management act in ways which might give staff the feeling that they are in control when they are not. Analysing Harriet's interview, however, her language upholds a keen sense of autonomy: 'gives you', 'finding their own way' and 'ownership'. It's a sharp contrast to Victoria's account of teachers needing to be 'told to'.

The contrast between Harriet and Victoria's description of their schools is a clear example of how different schools can be experienced under the influence of management. It must be noted that we do not hear how Victoria's school is experienced from a teacher's perspective, but we do see how she views teachers and how she sees them as behaving in her school. Both schools are located in areas of high deprivation, but they are also in boroughs which have affluent neighbouring schools, putting pressure on them to perform on par with their peers. Victoria speaks of teachers not having 'the freedom to explore and become a good teacher within their own merit' yet Harriet speaks of the 'ownership' of her practice. Harriet credits this ownership with the importance of self-reflection time:

It actually makes it a lot easier and you actually feel less pressured...because you feel in control of the process.

What became poignant in Harriet's interview was the way in which the self-reflection was managed and how teachers within the school utilised it. Harriet comments on what others may perceive as just a passing staff room conversation:

We sit and talk about a certain child that is having difficulties and try to find solutions for each other and we're very supportive of each other because we...know the pressures that each other are under.

For Harriet, this is not regarded as simply staffroom chat; she sees self-reflection as embedded within the discourse of the school and therefore she views discussions with staff about children as reflective and helpful to her practice. Within the ethos of the school she perceives that teachers were not expected to shoulder the burden of performativity alone, but to share workable solutions and support each other when dealing with certain situations. In contrast to Jeffrey and Wood's observation of the 'deprofessionalisation' of teachers (1996) meaning the pressure of time constraints and lack of autonomy within the classroom led to less time for self-reflection, Harriet is given time for reflection, which she feels helps to strengthen her autonomy and her ability to take control within the classroom: 'you feel in control of the process'. Harriet feels as though she has ownership of her pedagogy and practice, presenting an account of her teaching which is not indicative of a reduction to the 'technician status' (1996:138) that I felt as 'Enforced I'. Reflecting on the comparisons between Harriet's sense of autonomy and my experience as 'Enforced I', it emerges that feelings of ownership play a key factor in the quest for autonomy. When discussing my role as a reluctant enforcer I commented on the 'intrusion into my classroom' and with regards to my teaching space, never feeling as though 'I was able to own it'. The sense of ownership that Harriet has allows her a sense of freedom; it may appear coerced to the outsider, but her perception is that she has autonomy.

Harriet and Victoria both discussed the significance of the uniqueness of their schools and the effect this had on the autonomy within the classroom. In comparison, Thea, a supply teacher, gave a different insight to the assertion of her positionality and power. Whereas Harriet and Victoria's interviews were focused on the school and the systems of behaviour within the school, Thea's interview was less focused on the enforcement of teacher identity and pedagogy, and more on the validity of her identity as a 'real' teacher; she expressed a sense of lost identity in terms of how she was perceived by others:

As a permanent teacher you are a person. As a supply teacher you're just a er...a number, I suppose, a resource to be managed.

For Thea, her identity and authority as a teacher is questioned by both staff and pupils because she is not a permanent member of staff. However, she describes a sense of autonomy within the classroom itself as she is able to freely exercise her pedagogical beliefs:

If there's work left that I don't feel is suitable for the children, because some, some permanent staff do leave such rubbish cover work, you have to do your own. You know, and I think I'll get more out of them that way. So yes, I do have more autonomy because I pitch the work at the level of the children.

Thea views herself as having 'more autonomy' within the classroom; her supply teacher status appears to empower her decision-making within the classroom. Without the restrictions of performativity, as experienced by permanent members of staff, Thea makes choices about what is taught, even when it goes against what she has been given. However, the costs for this assertion of agency is the way in which she is viewed by other professionals: 'suddenly you lose all that expertise'. She continues: 'they tend to assume that you can't get a job and not that it's a lifestyle choice'. In contrast to the other teachers, Thea can assert her agency, up to a point, more freely, but her identity as a professional is called into question by her peers. Not being wholly embedded within the school context on a permanent basis affords her a greater sense of freedom but affects how others perceive her. This will be explored in relation to performativity in more detail in the next section.

### [Creativity versus Performativity and Assessment](#)

Exploring the contrast between different school contexts accentuates the tensions and contradictions of maintaining creativity within a performance related education system. This was something that I struggled with during my time as an NQT, in terms of my situational subjectivity; this led to the formation of 'Enforced I' and 'Target Driven I'. Assessment is arguably one of the most influential factors within the English education system and, as outlined in Chapter 2, there is no question that teachers must operate within a performative culture. There are certain tensions that arise from this

contradiction between creativity and performativity; can teachers experience their work as agentic within such contexts, and if so, how is this agency afforded?

Continuing with the theme of looking from the inside, I will begin by reflecting on my own journal entries before 'looking out' to the data within interviews. Assessment and the target driven nature of education was something that I struggled with during my time at my second school and there were occasions when I felt as though I was consenting to teach for productivity, overthrowing professional judgement 'through the technology of deliverology' (Ball,2011a:614). "Levelling", a process of grading children's work using government criteria, was all-consuming and it made me question if such a focus on data was aiding transparency of children's apparent progress, or shielding it. The following extract was taken from a journal entry written during a time when I saw myself as 'Target Driven I'. The journal entry was written during my early doctoral studies and formed part of the data for my first written assignment which focused on the effect of target setting and assessment within school. Assessment was a huge focus within the school and half termly data was entered and tracked throughout the course of the school year. As an outstanding school, teachers were expected to move the pupils 4 APS (Average Point Score) points from September to July. The levels were broken down into sub levels, for example the lowest level 3 was a 3c and highest a 3a. Pressure was on staff to perform and there often seemed to be a discrepancy in the results when children moved to their new teacher in September; one such case is described in the following extract:

#### Journal Entry 6a

The numbers do not make sense yet levels are all that are talked about. Lucy was furious today and showed me the assessment data from last year. It would appear that last year some of her children made 12 sub levels progress. I cannot begin to understand how this could have been accepted by senior management. Lucy is really upset because she feels as though a lot of the children are nowhere near the level that was recorded at the end of the summer and that she will be forced to record their levels as regressing this term.

It seems questionable that a child would have made 12 sub levels in one year when accelerated progress would have been 4 sub levels. This was a common problem within



the school; autumn term assessments would often reveal regression among pupils because children had apparently made such huge progress the previous year. In September, teaching staff would question the levels that children had been awarded in the previous summer term. As an outstanding school, the senior management were keen to keep the school's status, and accelerated progress throughout the course of the year was vital. The school's status, in turn, reflected the senior management team's status as one that was well regarded, among other schools and colleagues, in an area of high deprivation. Ball refers to the desire to 'be outstanding, successful, above average' (2003:219); this is an example of how that desire can filter down from senior management and creep into the classroom. In this sense, it is not so much the desire to succeed, but desire not to fail. In the following journal entry, which was a follow up conversation to my previous entry, I portray Lucy as being 'forced' into a situation, one that would depict her in a bad light. In the quest for desired results, consequences for the next teacher were ignored and the authenticity of such results called into question. Lucy spoke to senior management about her concerns and told me about the outcomes:

#### Journal Entry 6b

Me: So what have you decided to do?

Lucy: I haven't been given a choice, I recorded the grades as they stand and I was told that they're not allowed to show regression because of the SIP [school improvement plan] and I've had to either keep them the same or move them a sub level. Now I'm going to have to do so much with them to try and catch up with last year's grades.

I had no gravitas in this situation, being merely someone for Lucy to speak to; she was very concerned about how the supposed 'transparent' results had made her look and the burden of work that it would put on her. The word 'choice' is referred to again and the removal of the teacher's choice in this situation is a powerful move by senior management. If the pupils appear to have regressed, this could have a negative effect on the future grading of the school; as a result, the class teacher had to 'adhere to the modes of regulation, targets that conform to producing measurable outputs' (Ball, 2003:223), her 'beliefs [were] no longer important – it is the output that counts' (Ball, 2003:22).

Lucy's professional identity was being called into question with the results, her worth decreasing with the regression of student performance; this led me to reflect on the contrasting effect performativity had on Thea. Her supply teacher status allowed her to escape such surveillance but, in her opinion, at the cost of her professional identity:

I'm not worthy of knowing about the latest developments...as if I don't need to know them and regards to CPD as well.

Thea's language is powerful, 'I'm not worthy' is a strong statement to make about the perception of your professional identity. In Thea's discourse, it is though she perceives others as affording her more freedom within the classroom because her lessons are not important; she is temporary and does not qualify for the same restrictions of performativity and assessment as other teachers within the school. Whereas Lucy feels trapped within performativity and worries that it will diminish her worth as a teacher, not having the restrictions of performativity seems to deny Thea of a professional identity. It is an interesting concept; within the restrictions of performativity there is also opportunity to create a perceived identity. Success of the teacher self is measured in line with Ofsted grading and if you are not privy to such grading is your identity absent? 'The quest to achieve the desired status' (Ball, 2003:219) is denied.

Although the accumulation of pleasing data was a substantial focus of the school during the time I saw myself as 'Target Driven I', now, on reflection, there was evidence within my journal entries of room for meaningful relationships between pupils and staff that did not simply focus on assessment data. The school was situated in an area of high deprivation and there were regular safeguarding issues and instances which needed class teachers to be more than just an imparter of knowledge. I wrote about an example of this in a journal entry a couple of months after the previous entry with Lucy; a girl in my class was going through the process of moving back in with her father after being in foster care for a year and did not see her mother regularly:

#### [Journal Entry 7](#)

Today Child A came in to class upset. I can always tell if something has happened because she becomes more introvert than usual. I asked if she wanted to have a talk and while Veronica (the graduate teacher) was teaching, we went outside

the room to speak. Child A was upset because her mother had not turned up to an organised meeting with her that weekend. We talked about it for a while and I asked if Child A wanted to write to her mother. She said that she did but that it would take too long, and she might lose her trail of thought. I said that I would scribe but I would not offer any comments or comment on what she wanted to write. Child A agreed, and she spent the next forty minutes dictating to me. With so many life altering thoughts in her head, how is she able to focus in school?

I was unable to see how a child going through so much personal upheaval and trauma could possibly focus on school work. This journal entry illustrates that, despite the target driven nature of the school and being at a time where I perceived myself as 'Target Driven I', there was manoeuvrability to maintain the importance of teacher pupil relationships; I managed to navigate the tensions within my role as her teacher and find space to address her emotional well-being, and it is important to explore how this was achieved. My concern in this passage is not about achieving results or getting the child to focus on school work, it is on how to help a child who is clearly upset to manage complex feelings. She did not come to me for help initially, but as her class teacher, I knew the norms of her behaviour and, as a child who was experiencing difficulties in her home life, she was someone I kept a close eye on. It was her behaviour that prompted me to speak to her, not a lack of concentration in class or a reluctance to do her work; the focus was on the whole child, not what she was producing. But it is significant that in order to address her problems and to speak to her 'we went outside the room'; while there was room for manoeuvre to exercise my values as a caring professional, it occurred outside the classroom. While there were obvious practical reasons for this - the sensitive nature of her situation and the need to speak privately, not wanting to disturb Veronica's lesson - it is symbolic that the welfare of the child is treated outside the classroom; it is as though performativity and its constraints must be removed if we are to look at the child as whole.

My journal entries both contradict and support Ball's statement that 'teachers are concerned that what they do will not be captured by or measured within the metrics of accountability' (Ball, 2003:223). In journal entries 6a and b, Lucy's practice and possibly her pedagogy were distorted by the imposition of 'metrics of accountability'. No matter

what the pupil's 'real' levels were, she was required to paint a different picture that would adhere to the school's improvement plan. In her commentary she thought of the implications for herself not for the children. Clearly, only one conversation was captured, so it is not necessarily the case that implications for her pupils were never considered, but in this particular incident it was the implications for herself that were discussed and her status as a teacher. Conversely, despite the 'tensions' of performative pressure, I would argue that there were 'authentic and purposeful relationships' with teachers and pupils; the previous journal entry demonstrated that when a child's welfare, whether it be mental or physical, was in question, there was space to prioritise that child. However, it must also be noted that there was a clear difference between the two incidents: Lucy's story was concerned with teaching whereas I was discussing caring for a child. Lucy was having to sacrifice how she taught whereas my teaching was not affected and, significantly, the caring for the child took place outside the classroom. Journal entry 7 suggests that there were spaces for limited agency to be found and opportunities to withhold values and beliefs. A key factor in this manoeuvrability was the number of staff: teachers, teaching assistants, PGCE students and graduate teachers all ensured that a child was always listened to and cared for; the pressures of performativity and Ofsted were challenging, and in Lucy's case did affect the way she taught, but I would question that it wholly 'restructured [teaching] into caring predominantly for pupil performance' (Jeffrey, 2002:354).

The title of Ball's paper 'The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity' sets the tone for his argument about target setting and the performative nature of the education system. When I was ensconced in such an environment as 'Target Driven I', my beliefs sat with much of Ball's depiction of the modern-day teacher. As 'Enforced I', I was in a state of constant anxiety and was ruled by target setting and grey tracking sheets to prove my worth. The lack of ownership over my practice meant I felt coerced in my practice and the quest for desirable results became all consuming. Now, following reflection on my previous journals, however, my perspective has begun to shift and I notice chinks of light, affording space for assertion of agency; consideration of the following journal entry brought to light the possibility of a positive affect that policy may have on a teacher's practice. It made me question the negative connotations that come

with targets and performativity and to look at them from a different, more optimistic, perspective.

The following extract records a conversation with the deputy head at my second school when I perceived myself to be 'Target Driven I'. I wrote the journal entry during my early doctoral studies and included it my first assignment regarding professionalism, as mentioned in the methodology, which focused on assessment. The focus of the exchange was the selection of children for my performance management; my performance for the year would be judged on how the pupils in this focus group performed. The school focus was on improving boys' writing and children with special educational needs were not usually included in performance management focus groups because it was widely accepted that their rate of progression was not in line with national average, and that they would not be expected to make accelerated progress. On this occasion I was told a boy in my class with SEN would be included in my focus group.

#### Journal Entry 3a

**Deputy:** Well we wouldn't expect you to move him 8, you'd need to move him 4 APS points.

**Me:** But he only moved 2 last year and I don't have a teaching assistant to be able to give regular focus groups to these pupils. I'm really not sure about these three boys, I'm not sure it's possible. Could we not focus on three girls who are just below national average too, rather than SEN children?

**Deputy:** Your performance management group are meant to be a group that are challenging and we can't have girls as that's not the focus.

**Me:** There's challenging and nigh on impossible.

**Deputy:** Sorry but the head has been very specific about which level of children need to be pushed.

My displeasure in this suggestion is clear and I refer to the 'challenge' as 'nigh on impossible' thus illustrating Ozga's argument that, 'reform of education in England, [is] linked to the creation of depersonalised judgement and increasingly driven by

apparently objective data' (2009:153). This is the first point in my journal entries where I have outwardly shown some resistance and expressed my frustrations to senior management. For me to go against my 'Pleasing I' and not immediately comply is significant in illustrating how exasperated I was with the process of performativity. My part of the conversation focuses on resisting the selected group and I even suggest an alternative solution. At the time of writing up the entry I felt that it was an unfair situation, driven by senior management and the desire to tick boxes. After reflection and discussion with my doctoral action learning set, my feelings about the incident shifted from simply feeling it was unjust to believing that this judgement was 'depersonalised' because girls were immediately being left out of the focus groups to adhere to the focus on school policy. There were no other boys who suited the criteria in terms of their current levels, but there were a lot of girls; the girls were not allowed to be part of the group because they were not part of the writing drive, despite some needing the extra push. A reflection that was written to accompany the transcription of the conversation details my frustration at the situation:

#### Journal Entry 3a

I am pretty certain, however, I will not be able to move those children 4 APS points within a year. The head and deputy have become so deluded with figures and charts that they seem to be viewing children as figures and are not considering the background to this task. I am being coerced into being the 'compliant technician'.

My summation of the meeting was overwhelmingly negative and language such as 'coerced' and 'deluded' echo Ball's thoughts that teachers must 'adhere to the models of regulation, targets that conform to producing measurable outputs' (Ball, 2003:223). I felt that what I was being told was wrong, but my 'Pleasing I' ensured that, after some initial resistance, I complied with senior management's requests. The following journal entry, however, begins to offer an alternative perspective:

### Journal Entry 3b

I've become ensconced in collecting data to prove that I'm doing my job

- Creating morning writing activities for my target children
- Giving them reward charts for writing
- 1-1 writing slots with my TA
- Extra spelling activities
- Weekly spelling homework

Initially it may appear that this is another example of Ball's compliant, 'reformed teacher' (2003:222) who is 'simply responsive to external requirements and specified targets' (2003:222). I am responding to specified targets - Ball claims 'no longer can the teacher be the judge of their own pedagogy or practice' (2003:223). In the introductory sentence I describe myself as being 'ensconced' in data to prove my worth, suggesting that it has taken over me and, at first glance, my pedagogy. The sense of the removal of choice has continued from the previous entry where I was not allowed to judge who would benefit from a focus group. Did this mean that I relinquished total control over my pedagogy? Reflecting on this situation now, although coerced, the system I created to further the children was my own; I had been given targets, but how I responded to them and what I did within the confines of the classroom to achieve those results was not dictated. This does not leave a lot of room for autonomy, but I was able to make some decisions within the classroom. This perspective was brought to light during a doctoral action learning set discussion. I found the discussion significant in altering my perspective of the situation and wrote about the incident in a journal entry after the meeting. Contradicting my previous thoughts on unrealistic target setting, the child discussed with my deputy head in the journal entry 3a achieved the targets set and attained them a term early. At a doctoral study session, I was discussing the incident and, despite the child achieving, bemoaning the fact that I was given such seemingly unrealistic targets, when a question from my action set made me reconsider my view:

#### Journal Entry 4

A member of my doctorate action set questioned, 'Would you have made such an effort if those targets weren't presented to you?' The changes that were being made were not changes that I would have initiated, but ultimately would they benefit the children? Was I being more reticent because I felt that changes were being put upon me rather than questioning whether these changes would have the desired effect, which was to improve their writing.

In journal entry 3a, I stated that the targets were 'nigh on impossible' and 'simply not achievable'. The way in which the targets had been put upon me made me immediately reticent and, initially, unwilling to try and achieve them. My 'Pleasing I' took over and I looked at ways I could help the pupil achieve the set targets. What did not occur to me until I was asked the above question, is that although I was not happy with the way in which the targets had been presented they did fulfil the pupils' academic potential. As I state in the conversation with the deputy head, the child had been a low achiever and my expectations of him were also low. The answer to whether I 'would have made such an effort if those targets weren't presented to' me is, no, I expect I would not have. I had perceived the pupil as low achieving and therefore did not have high expectations for him in my class. It made me reconsider my perspective, not only of the situation, but also on the effect of targets. At the time of being given the targets I researched and spoke to different teachers about different techniques to improve writing, and in hindsight, it improved my teaching. As discussed in Chapter 2, Ball refers to 'policy technologies' as:

provid[ing] a new language, a new set of incentives and disciplines and a new set of roles, positions and identities within which it means to be a teacher, student/learner, parent and so on are all changed. (Ball, 2008:42)

While Ball's intention is to critique the system, this statement does not have to indicate a negative situation. At the time I was given the targets, I would have interpreted his comments to mean how disciplines within school were forcing me to be in a position I did not want to be in; the language of targets meant that my position was being manipulated. I was having to bring a new focus on writing into the classroom, 'providing a new language' and 'incentives' in the form of reward charts for the pupil. The question



from my action set, however, prompted a new way of thinking; I wrote about being questioned because it brought about such a powerful realisation. Now, on reflection I can view Ball's comments in a different light; interpreting this within my own context and experience, 'a new set of incentives' in terms of my performance management targets made me re-evaluate what 'it means to be a teacher'. I misjudged the capability of a pupil who I thought could not achieve, and without such 'disciplines' I may not have learnt that lesson. In this case, the result of the performance management meeting led to agentic practice within my classroom and what is becoming apparent in the exploration of my data, is that the issue does not always lie with a 'new set of incentives and disciplines', but the effect or appearance of the removal of choice and the perspective of the person who is allowed or not allowed to choose. Reflection allowed me to see that I still had an element of choice in my situation, in relation to what and how writing was taught, but at the time I did not see any choice. Being told what the pupil needed to achieve meant that I interpreted the entire process as prescriptive and negative. Such reflections and discussions within my doctorate action set aided my reflexivity, giving me an outsider's view to reassess my insider experience.

Within Victoria's interview, there were instances where she expressed feelings of coercion and teaching for targets; she spoke about the difficulty of trying to combine a creative timetable with academic pressures, in particular 'the introduction of the grammar, punctuation and spelling test'. This led to her timetabling half an hour to teach discretely: 'to ensure that [our] children were performing in those particular things', because this was an area where 'we performed really poorly'. This triggered questions from the local authority and:

to my annoyance, grammar, spelling and punctuation then became part of my school improvement plan. And, yes, the children have done a lot better, and I'm not saying I don't agree with that being a stronger element within writing, but it's the way that it's done and it's the fact that I now feel that I have to work in a way that I'd not initially intended.

There are similarities between this passage and my journal entries concerning my performance management targets. Victoria is in a situation where some choice has been removed and her school improvement plan has been prescribed; in contrast to her

previous ownership of school policy, Victoria's use of 'we' is not present in this account: 'grammar, spelling and punctuation then became' part of the school's focus, from a nameless entity which she is not part of. Victoria also puts herself within the extract, 'I now feel', 'I have to' 'I'd not' illustrating that she is personally feeling affected by these changes. Similar to my feelings, Victoria expresses that she is being coerced into working 'in a way that I'd not initially intended'. The removal of certain choices can influence a person's perception of what choices are left and therefore how much agency remains. In this case, Victoria does not portray herself as having options in the implementation of the school improvement plan. In contrast to Victoria's local authority, Harriet's senior management team developed ways of managing which were described by Harriet as enabling ownership, and she felt as though some choices were left for her to make. Victoria comments that her pupils have improved and as a conscientious head teacher, it could be argued that Victoria would have put interventions into place anyway, without local authority intervention; it is the prescriptive nature of the changes and the removal of choice within her school improvement plan which appears to frustrate her. In this respect, Victoria exemplifies Ball's analysis of teachers as being part of a 'consensual culture' rather than 'learning culture' (2011a:614) but within this 'consensual culture' the children are achieving set targets. Even as a head teacher who works beside 'head teachers who are achieving incredibly high results, feeling pressure from my peers', Victoria still describes herself as having a degree of choice and able to assert her agency. It is notable that there is a contradiction between the assertion of her agency and then controlling what her teacher's do:

I do feel that I'm still a head teacher who is reflective and will actually say no to some things...because I believe I have a good enough argument. I can get by.

There is little 'overthrowing of professional judgment' (Ball, 2011a:614) in this statement; Victoria is clear in her role as a 'narrator' (Ball, 2011b:626) within her school and sees herself as not simply working within the 'narrative of the school' (2011b:626) but is creating it. On reflection of how Victoria situates herself within these circumstances, there is a notable tension between the assertion of Victoria's agency and the control over her teachers and what they do. In my conversation with the deputy head about performance management she stated that 'the head has been very specific

about which level of children need to be pushed'. We can see a similar assertion of authority from Victoria: when she exerts her agency 'this is the way we do it here' she also describes herself as restricting others and that they are 'moulded into a particular way of being'. When Victoria is pushed from those above her, such as the local authority, she reclaims control over the situation by asserting her agency within the school.

There are continuing tensions and contradictions aligned with agency within Victoria's interview; for example, when speaking about the recent changes in performance management she states that 'everything is performance related in terms of their pay'. In the current education system, if a teacher does not achieve certain levels for the children in their class, they will not be able to move up the pay scale. This could be another reason why Lucy was so concerned about the levels of her children and Victoria calls such pressure on 'intrinsically motivated teachers' 'an insult on their professionalism' and believes that 'they would naturally get those children to those targets but perhaps not in a dictated way'. After reflecting on journal entries 3a, 3b and 4, I would question whether that is the case; I know I would not have 'naturally' got that child to achieve the results he did without the pressure of targets. Victoria continues by questioning the validity of such assessment data and states that:

even they will feel immense pressure and that's where some of the fixing of results may come in; because, let's just bump that child up to 3b because that overall makes the job that I've done in the classroom look better.

The 'they' that Victoria is referring to are the 'good' teachers, it is: 'something hanging over their head, that my pay isn't going to go up if I don't get them there.' However, she also recognises that there are some advantages to this system:

So, I think even good teachers would see the benefit of that type of performance management...because it does actually, you know, remove those teachers that shouldn't be in that position.

Victoria has acknowledged that assessment and targets have improved results and that they can help to 'remove' teachers who are not benefitting the children.

As a head teacher, Victoria recognises the importance of being able to ensure the teaching within her school is of a certain level and that she can take steps to remove low performing teachers.

The other end of the spectrum is that I do agree with it as a head, I know in the past it's been very difficult to get rid of poor performing teachers. Teachers that just do, you know, what they want basically. Their planning isn't good, their marking isn't good...They don't move the children forward in their learning.

In such cases, Victoria, views performativity from a different perspective; a certain amount of control is afforded to her as a head teacher which empowers her to use performance management to maintain the school's standards, enforcement of targets means: 'that there isn't anywhere for those type[s] of teachers to go.' It is only for a brief time that Victoria expresses approval of the performative culture, but insightful in the tensions she experiences in managing performativity within her school.

Earlier in the interview, Victoria acknowledged that the focus on grammar, punctuation and spelling within her school improved results, but she still displayed displeasure about the situation and being told what to do. Her perception of the situation was negative, and she was concerned about the costs that were involved in the achievement of such targets, highlighting the tensions that accompany measurable data: 'it was another half an hour taken off the timetable'. The focus on the measurable asks teachers to think about the child in terms of ability in core subjects, not as the whole child. In my journal entry, in order to help a child with the unmeasurable, I removed her from the classroom; writing, spelling or maths would not have been beneficial to her at that time, she needed time to speak. The emotional development the child made, that academic year, was not measurable by assessment data or targets but vital to her well-being. Consideration must be given to what is given up in the process of achieving such results; are more creative subjects lost, does it create an imbalance with less measured subjects or experiences? Victoria understands these tensions and as someone who is 'very passionate' about being creative and having a creative curriculum, she struggles when having to adhere to prescribed targets. The second passage of her interview is littered with reference to being 'creative' and the word was mentioned four times. However, as the interview progressed, and she spoke more about assessment, creativity was referred

to less. Looking at her language, it appeared that Victoria's creativity and, in a sense, freedom to practice as she wished, was governed by the pressures of performativity.

Harriet's self-reflection appeared to allow her a greater sense of agency within the classroom. She feels 'in control of the process' yet, within her interview there are aspects which seem to contradict this. Like Victoria, Harriet acknowledges the importance of assessment and credits it with being able 'to see those children who are falling through the cracks' but also states that pressure for attainment meant she 'spent less time thinking about how to make learning enjoyable'. It is the conflict with creativity and achievement which seems to frustrate both Victoria and Harriet. As a PGCE student, Anna also felt that she 'wasn't being creative enough' in her first placement and worries that she'll:

get caught up with thinking about the outcomes, the outcomes, the outcomes and not actually planning a lesson that the children genuinely enjoy, which is why I wanted to come into teaching. It was to make a really interactive and fun learning experience that the children really enjoyed being part of.

Here, Anna observes that it is difficult to hold onto her aims and values as a teacher in the face of concerns with targets. Similarly, Victoria speaks of being passionate about the creative curriculum and Harriet wants to 'make learning enjoyable'. As with my 'Target Driven I', there is a struggle between a sense of an intrinsic teaching identity and that which they feel is being dictated to them; for all of us this perception may cause the feeling that 'beliefs are no longer important – it is the output that counts' (Ball, 2003:223). As 'Target Driven I' I was ruled by targets; I still had my beliefs, but as they were unmeasurable they were 'no longer important'. Anna is different in this respect because she still has a strong hold on her beliefs and refers to them as the reason for becoming a teacher. As previously mentioned, I also show conflict with the desire to be creative and in my role as a student mentor, to allow others to be creative and the need to conform to authority. There is an understanding, however, of the importance of assessment and policy within schools; for example, Victoria describes an 'understand[ing] that standardisation needs to exist' and has already stated that it is not the targets themselves that are the issue 'but the way that it's done'. The tensions lie in the suggestion that such pressure and targets make teaching less agentic and possibly

alter the sense of self as a teacher. Victoria's interview highlights tensions between who she feels she is - as 'reflective' and 'creative' - and the oppression that she feels which makes her 'work in a way that I'd not initially intended'. Victoria's sense of self is clear and so is the struggle to assert this self in the drive to meet targets. Do teachers lose their sense of self completely? Is it altered? Or does it remain and is simply oppressed?

As a PGCE student, Anna gives a different insight into the importance of government policy. Anna uses 'the National Curriculum as a guide' and expresses concern that 'we don't really know how assessment is going to be carried forward with levelling being taken away from schools.' Her language suggests that schools will be losing something from the removal of levelling and she continues 'I'm sure school will stay with level descriptors because they're really helpful'. In this sense the levels are giving Anna guidance and support; they are not a hindrance to her, at this stage, because she perceives them as a guide to ensure she is doing the right thing, just as Victoria uses them as a guide to ensure her teachers are moving 'the children forward in their learning'. Here the teachers' values and subjectivity are seen to be intertwined, and when a policy or procedure marries with their values or beliefs the teacher and their way of thinking become part of the discourse 'by policy concepts which have sedimented over time in the language of teaching' (Ball et al, 2011a:622). Anna's discourse is littered with policy talk, 'levels', 'assessment' and she actively uses the National Curriculum to inform her lessons even when she is not required to. Her language as a new teacher is guided by adhering to standards; as a PGCE student this is what she has had to do in order to pass the course. The language she knows is about what she has experienced as a student and has been heavily influenced by needing to attain certain targets herself.

Looking to a more experienced teacher, there is a lot of conflict in Victoria's talk. Whereas Anna's tensions are more basic in terms of recognising a conflict between creativity and assessment pressures, Victoria comments on the 'particular type of discourse' that league tables use, yet she also uses such discourse herself. She states that she 'understand[s] that standardisation needs to exist' and that as a head she wants her staff 'to be performing', an illustration of Ball's (2011) 'language of teaching'; Victoria is caught up in the rhetoric and cannot always separate herself from it. In

Victoria's account, the sense of self and the measured worth of a teacher, is intertwined with government policy and the judgement of performance by others. This affects Victoria's positionality; 'you're just working towards that particular criteria and you're just measured against a particular thing'. She is not able to take the creative stance that she would like and is coerced into a certain way of working. Part of this issue for Victoria was 'feeling pressure from [my] peers' thus illustrating Lumby's point, drawing on the work of Bauman and Goffman's argument (2009) whereby they claim that data is used as a requirement to illustrate worth and value to consumers, as well as the self. Victoria's self-worth as a head teacher is measured by the perception of her peers and results from the league tables, echoing Ball's notions of education as a competitive market. The system needs to show educational progression in the form of league tables and levels; Victoria needs to provide that to demonstrate her worth. In this instance, the system seems to dictate what Victoria needs to provide.

Harriet also speaks of the conflicts of needing to provide in a target driven setting; she describes an impending Ofsted inspection as a stressful time: 'everyone was on this train of observation, feedback, observation, feedback', so much so that, 'it really made me consider leaving'. When Ofsted did come, her school achieved 'good' status, which Harriet credits as 'a massive achievement'; she attributes this to Ofsted recognising 'that [they] were reflective practitioners'. Harriet's perception of the worth of the school was created by Ofsted criteria; the 'train of observation' was created by senior management in the hope of being measured favourably. Harriet tries to take some ownership over the accomplishment and affiliates success with her sense of self as a reflective practitioner, not the never-ending flow of observations. In agreement with Jeffrey's argument, Harriet feels a certain 'satisfaction [to be] gained from achievement of goals and improvement in performance' (2002:532). However, because she does not agree with the process of Ofsted preparation, so much so that she considered leaving the profession, she credits something that works with her values and her beliefs of what it means to be a teacher, being self-reflective. Her sense of self was oppressed within what she referred to as 'the observation train', but it emerges again once approval has been met by Ofsted and she reclaims her practice. Returning to journal entry 6b, Lucy was very concerned about her measured worth because what she needed to provide in

order to meet approval was going to have an effect on her pedagogy and possibly how she was regarded in terms of Ofsted criteria; if she could not show accelerated progress for the children in her class, then she could not achieve 'outstanding' status.

Despite the restrictions imposed on teachers within a performative education system, there still seems to be a certain amount of manoeuvrability whilst preserving values. On reflection, elements of choice remain that may not be visible at first glance; managing challenging situations can offer ways in which the oppressed can find breathing space. Harriet and Victoria appear to hold onto their teaching identity as reflective practitioners: Harriet credits senior management for recognising the importance of reflection and Victoria refers to a head teacher who heavily influenced her approach. This led me to examine the effect an individual can have on a teachers' practice and how a sense of self and agency can be affected by personal relationships.

#### Personal Influence on Practice

In my current school, I worked with a PGCE student in my class for the summer term of 2015 for her final placement. My doctoral studies had sparked an interest in the influence of others on a teacher's practice; after reflecting on issues of hierarchy and power in a student mentor role, as part of an early assignment, I was interested to continue mentor-based reflections. At the time of writing the journal entry I had blamed a lot of previous pressures and conflicts within school on policy; it has been through the process of writing this thesis that an awareness of other factors and influences has been developed. During the exploration of my subjectivity, I have been able to extricate clear influences on my practice and be reflexive in my analysis of past situations. The following journal entry was written after a conversation with my PGCE student, Katherine, when I asked her how her peers were getting on in their placement schools:

#### Journal Entry 8

She said that she had been surprised at how much some of them were struggling. One girl who had previously achieved an 'outstanding' grade for her last placement, had now been put in the 'at risk of failure' category. I asked her why she thought this girl had taken such a huge dip. She said that the class teacher had not been helpful and did not work in the way that she was used to.



This echoes Victoria's description of new staff within a school:

They've got to plan in the way that we've set up in the school, also the mentor that's attached to them because they're the one who's going to be observing them.

Victoria comments on the significance of the mentor; the mentor in this case is described as the one who is carrying out the school's surveillance and ensuring that Victoria's new staff are working in 'the way that we've set up'. Policy on paper is simply written words, but it is those who interpret the policy who make choices about how it is to be delivered and enforced: 'interpretations are set within a school's position in relation to policy and the degree of imperative attached to any policy' (Ball et al, 2011a:619). Within a school it is the 'narrators' (2011a:626) who interpret and deliver the policy to staff, constructing the narrative of the school. In Victoria's school, she is the narrator and although parts of her story come from other influences, such as the local authority, she is the author. As a student, the teacher portrayed in Katherine's account needed to fit in with the ways of being in her new school, and for reasons unbeknown to me, she did not. This situation has led me back to my previous role in journal entry 5a as a reluctant enforcer. In my case, I allowed Adam to be perceived as unprepared by the head teacher because I did not inform him of the school expectations until it was noticed that he was not in line with them. It was my lack of enforcement that contributed to Adam being viewed in a certain way.

Such thoughts led me to write another journal entry reflecting on what influence I may have had over student teachers:

#### Journal Entry 8

It has now made me reflect on my previous students and how much I have coerced them into working in the same way I do. It appears that from Katherine's stories, students either must fall in line with the class teacher or face the prospect of being downgraded or leaving the profession entirely.

This illustrates Ball's argument that 'the neo-liberal subject is malleable rather than committed' (Ball, 2013:139). If the student remains committed to their pedagogy and proves unwilling to be, as Victoria puts it, 'moulded into a particular way of being' they

risk their future as a teacher. Ball touches on this more agentic viewpoint regarding freedom: 'the task is to produce ourselves, to make ourselves through practices of care' (Ball, 2013:147). Here, teachers are not necessarily committed to one way of teaching or thinking throughout their career, and that subjectivity is 'an active process of becoming' (2013:125). Reflection allows chinks of light, affording the teacher a greater sense of agency and freedom within their subjectivity. For example, in the exploration of my subjectivity I have uncovered the different 'Situational I's' which have influenced my pedagogy and practice. Victoria and Harriet both emphasise the way in which schools work differently and as a teacher you need to be able to adapt to different regimes; each new job could be considered to be an 'active process of becoming' (Ball, 2013:125) part of that school context. Within each new context come varying avenues that have the potential to allow the teacher to maintain certain values and experience their work as agentic; as explored in my journal entries, this space may not always be obvious. Victoria cites a particular leader who inspired her practice and encouraged her to maintain her beliefs:

She looked at the curriculum from a very different perspective, and although it kind of incorporated things the National Curriculum wanted, she was able to tailor that to the children in a very creative manner.

A lot of where agency lies within my data is how the actors manage the contradictory aspects of their lives and of themselves. In this extract, Victoria describes her head teacher as managing such tensions in a successful way, asserting her agency to provide a creative approach. Victoria's account also demonstrates such conflicts and she also has a desire to remain creative:

I tried in my school again to have a creative timetable, yes with some structure with the literacy and numeracy.

This illustrates the tensions between Victoria having to conform to expectation and what is measurable, and holding on to her sense of self and values. In this instance, the implementation of a creative timetable is an assertion of Victoria's agency; within the prescriptiveness of the curriculum she has been able to manage a way in which she can

preserve her sense of self. It is evident that Victoria feels immense pressure to conform and at a later stage in the interview such tensions seem harder for her to manage:

Because sometimes you just don't have the time and, you know, there's probably not a Year 6 teacher who wouldn't say that they spend half of the year practising for their SATs tests...and you know, what actual opportunities does that provide for the children in terms of a rich, broad and balanced curriculum? It isn't.

Here, Victoria recognises the tensions between what is measured in terms of SATs tests and giving children experience in creative subjects that are not measured. She demonstrates that it is not always possible to assert agency in such situations and will sometimes remove herself from the discourse with the use of 'you' instead of 'I' as if to distance her sense of self.

Everything was very kind of, this is what the government has said, this is what we're going to do and I didn't believe that it was right for the children at that time. So I still, as my previous head did, I still tried to take on board what the government were saying, that we had to cover, but actually looking at the children and do it that way.

In comparison to Victoria's previous account of SATs testing, her sense of self and 'I' is present in this dialogue; suggesting she has more control. There are tensions between what the government requires and how Victoria can manage this; she asserts her agency in managing this conflict and identifies opportunity for manoeuvrability. Woods (1993) argued that a prescriptive education system left 'less scope for experimentation' (1993:358) where lessons were designed to suit the system rather than, 'stimulate children's interest and imagination' (1993:358). There is an indication within my data that such an education system does restrict teachers, in part, but what lies within these contradictions are opportunities for agency in the way that they are managed.

There is a strong sense within much of the data that the children are at the forefront of the teachers' minds, not just policy. Thea was different in the sense that she was removed from the pressures of assessment and coercion to policy, but she still uses her autonomy within the class to 'pitch the work at the level of the children'. Adam's 'snowy mountain' was created to engage the children and he put that experience above the

advice of senior management. Despite clear evidence in the data that teachers are subjected to rigid targets and feel pressure from outside agencies such as Ofsted or local authorities, such examples do not expose the teachers' 'alienation of the self' (Ball, 2003:222), and they do not consistently substantiate Ball's depiction of Diane or Chloe; rather, they reveal their values intact, albeit sometimes oppressed, and finding agency in trying to align their sense of self with their practice. It is important to understand that the sense of self is not necessarily fixed and neither are the opportunities to assert agency.

### Summary

In this chapter, I have looked from the inside, in terms of my journal entries, and used my reflections as a tool to inform my interview analysis. I then returned to my journal entries and looked at situations from a different perspective; I gave the outsider, in the guise of interviewees, opportunity to inform my insider analysis and reflection. I became more aware of my subjectivity and realised a reluctance in myself to 'put upon' others which in turn made me question the consequences for others. I became aware of conflict between being creative and adhering to authority and such tensions were also visible in my interviews. There were clear instances of the sense of self being oppressed; for example, Victoria felt peer pressure to perform and had to comply with the local authority's demands; yet amongst such prescription, I also uncovered a strong sense of the self. Frustration and feelings of unfairness illustrated that the self was not lost or taken away, but that a struggle to find manoeuvrability for agency must be fought. Words, such as, 'reflective', 'creative', 'ownership', 'control' alluded to professionals who knew themselves and their teaching identity, but certain situations led to them feeling 'coerced' and put upon. The next chapter will return to my exploration of subjectivity and the decisiveness of the 'Situational I's' as a measure of agency; I question where manoeuvrability lies in an over restricted education system. What is it about certain situations and perceptions about yourself that make one situation more agentic than another? Having looked at my journal entries as a guide to inform my analysis, I now explore the data using the 'Situational I's' as a tool for reflection and analysis.

## Chapter 5 - A Return to my 'Situational I's'

In qualitative inquiry, [however], researchers tend to look again and again, and they look, moreover, in the varying moods and times of both the researcher and the researched. (Peshkin, 1988b:418)

This chapter returns to 'look again' at my 'Situational Is' identified in Chapter 3. In line with the theme of this thesis, from the inside looking out, and using the 'Situational Is' as headings, I examine where agency lies within each situational school context, drawing on links and contradictions between the data and my own experience. I look at the 'varying moods' of myself in terms of my 'Situational I's' and those of my interviewees. In the previous chapter themes emerged from my analysis which revealed glimpses of agency amongst the tension; in this chapter, in order to gain a deeper understanding and to create further opportunity for reflexivity, I explore where agency lies within more specific situations. Just as I did with the journal entries in the previous chapter, I look from the inside, at myself and my 'Situational I's' out to the interviews and examine the situations or contexts that allow for agency and what it looks like. In doing so, not every interview was relevant to every 'Situational I'; I draw upon relevant and similar experiences within the data to ensure that links are tangible and significant. I explore what it was within each of these 'Situational Is' that afforded a sense of agency and what made one context potentially more agentic than another. Is there space for a teacher's values to marry with their pedagogy and practice, and to feel a sense of ownership within the classroom? Are there instances when those values are completely lost, as Ball suggests, or is there a more positive outlook with opportunities for a sense of autonomy and ownership within the classroom?

### Finding Pedagogy I

In the exploration of this subjective I, the focus is on those teachers who are at the beginning of their career and the restrictions and freedom that they feel in their new role. Pedagogy is something a good teacher will reflect on throughout their career and is always being formed; when I named this 'I' it was to signify a time when I felt as though I had the freedom to find my own way and a sense of ownership over my practice. There will be part of me that is always finding my pedagogy but my reference to this 'I' here portrays a teacher in the early stages of their career. During the analysis of the data in

Chapter 4, it became apparent how restricted a student teacher can be in terms of their agency. For example, my PGCE student, Katherine commented on a student friend who was questioning whether to leave the teaching course because the class teacher had contacted the university due to a disagreement about her teaching style. In my journal entry describing Adam's 'snowy mountain' I related how his ideas were quashed by the assistant head and he was required to conform within the boundaries set by senior management. My NQT journal entries and Harriet's account describe an experience of a strict regime with no room for individuality or assertion of agency. These examples demonstrate the way in which the school context and the interpretation and imposition of policy may affect a teacher's practice and assertion of agency; Victoria alludes to this in her comments about new teachers starting at her school:

They come into a new school and they feel like an NQT again because somebody is telling them to do it differently.

Victoria implies that being an NQT means that you are going to be told to do things differently and that individuality in such a role is minimal. In this sense individuality could be seen as a partner of agency; if a teacher is able to practice in a unique way their agency must also be engaged. Victoria also states that this conformism does not apply just to NQTs but also to experienced members of staff who join the school. This illustrates my earlier observation that the formation of pedagogy is an on-going process; teachers at Victoria's school will potentially be told 'to do it differently'.

In Anna's account of her second school placement, she describes finding herself able to work more comfortably with the class teacher and therefore is not defined by either levels or the class teacher:

I'm using the National Curriculum as a guide...and the level descriptors as a guide, but it's not defining everything that I do, because I'm having, obviously I'm on a placement so I'm talking to my class teacher...and we're deciding together what the outcomes should be.

Words such as 'together' and 'guide' remove the prescriptive boundaries that were apparent elsewhere in her interview and suggest that Anna has a sense of ownership,

albeit with guidance. She appears to have choice in this context and is the most similar example to my own experience as 'Finding Pedagogy I'.

In my exploration of the 'Situational Identities' and the interview data, I have realised that 'Finding Pedagogy I' is also a continual process. New school contexts, policies, pupils, and staff members are but a few of the factors that have the potential to alter a teacher's pedagogy. Just as the 'Historical I' is apparent in each context, wearing it 'like a garment that cannot be removed' (Peshkin, 1988a:17), each context also encourages the teacher's pedagogy to form and reform, some with more constraints than others. In the exploration of my Situational Is, it is evident how pedagogy is shaped and moulded by new or different contexts, some allowing a greater sense of agency than others. The analysis in Chapter 4 elicited contradictions and tensions within the ownership of pedagogy in different situations, and illustrated the importance of perception. For example, Harriet felt as though she had 'ownership' and 'control' over her pedagogy but there were tensions between how this ownership was managed. There was still a strong element of control held by the senior management team, but Harriet still told the story of possessing her practice, her perception was that it gave her ownership.

#### Enforced I

My experience as 'Enforced I' was as an NQT in a controlling and prescriptive environment; journal entries at that time were very much about being 'done to'. I looked in my analysis of the interviews for evidence of similar experiences, looking at the interviewees' reactions, in terms of agency, to similar circumstances. As class teachers there were comparable instances between my and Harriet's NQT practice; she speaks about 'no wriggle room' and a 'massive paper trail' where 'everything had to be checked'. I referred to being 'under constant scrutiny' with 'files and lessons observed frequently'. As discussed in Chapter 4, neither Harriet nor I described a sense of agency and our accounts seem to echo Ball's (2003) depiction of Diane and Chloe, who were vessels of performativity rather than teachers with a sense of ownership. However, it must be noted that a similarity also lay in the fact that it was for both of us our NQT years; perhaps, it should be expected we would show a higher level of compliance as we were lacking in experience and not in a position of power.

This idea is illustrated further through exploring my subjectivity at my second school; here there was more of a feeling of 'freedom in terms of policy'. If I had been an NQT in this school, would this have been the same, or did feelings of freedom also come from a familiarity with the curriculum and what was expected? I was no longer an NQT and therefore I may have been perceived as someone who did not need as much direction; my position had altered. Harriet talks about feelings of being 'done to' in her second practice but it comes from a different perspective with a greater level of understanding about the reasons behind such decisions than in her NQT year:

What had been put upon me, yes, from the head teacher. But I also know that that was directly from government because our school is in a challenging area and had always been seen as not a good school because it wasn't achieving those things, like the levels, that other children are achieving in other areas.

Harriet's reflection on the situation affords her with more willingness to understand why she is being 'put upon' whereas no excuses were given for the senior management's actions in her NQT year. This gives a sense of 'us' and 'them' in terms of her school and government policy; the head teacher, although the enforcer in Harriet's school, is excused because she is also being 'put upon' by a higher level.

When asked for examples of instances when Harriet had felt that she had to do something in class that she felt was unnecessary or disagreed with, she said:

We have to test them every term, we have to analyse those tests, so we have to put them under that pressure, that we feel ourselves; so, we get annoyed with the children if they're not behaving in the way that we are expecting.

Harriet uses the phrase 'we have to' three times within the first sentence. There is no sense of autonomy or ownership in how she is describing her practice, thus resonating with Jeffrey and Woods (1996) depiction of teachers as technicians. As noted in Chapter 4, Harriet demonstrates an awareness of why this is the case:

I understand to an extent why it is done, because you can see those children who are falling through the cracks.



Harriet is sympathetic about the pressures of assessment, but she contradicts this by commenting that there is a necessity for it. There is a certain amount of agreement in terms of the children gaining knowledge, but also a concern for what the children are missing out on within such a test-based regime: 'is that really allowing the children to enjoy their learning experience? Because I don't think so'. In this instance Harriet's values and subjectivity do not marry with her practice; similar to my 'Enforced I', she is working in a way she does not believe in and one that she feels is not wholly beneficial for her pupils. She continues by speaking about the threat of Ofsted: 'we had observations every two weeks and feedback every two weeks and it was extremely stressful'. Although Ofsted initially appears as having a negative influence, after the inspection a more positive outcome is discussed:

However, the following year when Ofsted did come we got a "good" Ofsted for the first time ever for that school...which was a massive achievement because they recognised that we were reflective practitioners.

The whole process is not viewed as positive, but the achievement of "good" takes over Harriet's account; a desired outcome proved the worth of the school and seemed to affirm the value she saw in self-reflection. This did not afford her with a sense of agency, but her perception of why the school had been graded favourably allowed her to describe feelings of ownership and agency. As discussed in the previous chapter, it is the self-reflection time that Harriet credits for 'feel[ing] less pressured...because you feel in control of the process' and 'it's not dictated'. The pressures are not absent, but the way in which those pressures are managed allow room for feelings of autonomy and ownership.

Victoria presents a different perspective when examining aspects of an Enforced I. As previously considered in Chapter 4, she has a strong sense of ownership over her school and spoke about the creation of policies which defined the school and the way in which it is run. She also spoke of 'moulding' new staff into a certain way of being, enforcing policies, and what she refers to as 'school ethos', onto new staff. However, it is possible to focus on Victoria in the role of Enforced I in terms of what she feels she must do, in which she takes a different perspective from that of a class teacher. There are clear

contradictions within Victoria's interview about the amount of agency she has as Enforced I:

Everything was very kind of, this is what the government has said, this is what we're going to do and I didn't believe it was right for the children at that time; so I still, as my previous head did, I still tried to take on board what the government were saying that we had to cover, but actually looking at the children and do it that way.

There is an acknowledgement of government advice, but Victoria holds the children and what she feels is right for them at the forefront of her practice, allowing her values to marry with her sense of subjectivity, her values and beliefs. Victoria refers to the pressures of Ofsted as being her enforcer:

With the new Ofsted guidance and subsidiary guidance, you almost know the types of things you have to have in place within your school and that then makes you work in a particular way.

The use of 'have to' and 'makes you' illustrates the prescriptive nature of the guidelines and her feeling that she must adhere to them. Despite the coercion in terms of practice, she continues that she is: 'still a head teacher who is reflective and will actually say no to some things' if she 'believe[s] I have a good enough argument, I can get by.' This demonstrates a greater assertion of agency and Victoria's desire to maintain her values; she does not want to achieve technician status and is prepared to argue against it in order to maintain her beliefs. Just as Harriet credits the manoeuvrability of her agency with self-reflection time which allows her to take control of policy implementation in the classroom, Victoria also refers to reflectiveness before discussing her agency as a head teacher. This issue appears to be a recurring concept in a teacher's understanding of their positionality and potential for agency, and I return to it below.

Victoria returns to the topic of league tables, the effect they have on teachers and the way in which such discourse is presented:

Identities are lost in that you're just working towards that particular criteria and you're just measured against a particular thing and that determines whether

you're in an 'inadequate school, a 'requires improvement school', a 'good school', an 'outstanding school', based on very key criteria; and so that's what you're working towards all of the time, which at times, for me, can be detrimental, because it doesn't necessarily give me the freedom to work in a way that I believe is best to work with my families or to drive particular things forward.

This is a sharp contrast to the way in which she had previously asserted her agency and been willing to argue for her beliefs; beginning with such a powerful statement that 'identities are lost' demonstrates a clear struggle within Victoria to maintain her authority and values amongst the pressures put upon her by government requirements and grading systems. She regards such criteria as being 'detrimental' and removing freedom from the 'way that I believe is best to work'. At this point it could be argued that Ball's concept of 'policy technologies' (2008) is being realised by Victoria, and that her role is being redefined and dictated to. However, shortly afterwards, Victoria contradicts this loss of identity when talking about her school:

One thing that does make me quite happy, and I think is important, is when I do walk round my school...there's a definite way of working and for a head teacher that's brilliant because I think that adds to the ethos of your school...so almost there's a \_\_\_\_ Primary way of doing things.

Here 'the surprise, disorder and contradictions of a phenomenon' (Peshkin, 1988b:418) are captured; Victoria fluctuates between being lost in the educational rhetoric and owning it. Her identity as a head teacher has been reclaimed and this 'definite way of working' is referred to in a positive, not dictated manner. Victoria has managed the contradictions within her workplace and found a way to assert ownership over the school. Harriet also discusses the uniqueness of her school - 'we worked differently to other schools' - demonstrating that both schools and teachers have been able to forge a sense of autonomy and identity, despite what is being dictated to them. As discussed in Chapter 4, nearing the end of her interview, when considering her school policies, Victoria presents a strong sense of ownership over her school and the way 'we've set up in the school'.

It is evident that in the role of 'Enforced I', despite the difference in job role, both Harriet and Victoria struggle with maintaining their values and beliefs within their pedagogy. Both mention working in ways that they feel are prescribed to them and Victoria talks about 'loss of identity'. Amongst this bleak outlook, however, there are chinks of light that afford them both with a sense of ownership; Victoria still feels as though her school operates in a way which she has helped to form and in turn moulds new staff into a 'particular way of being'. Similarly, Harriet sets her school and herself away from the rigour of government policy - 'we worked differently to other schools' - and credits self-reflection time as a unique way of giving her a sense of ownership of her practice. Despite Victoria's concerns that 'identities are lost' arguably, hers and her school's are not. There is definite coercion to work and provide data in a certain way and she clearly fluctuates in the assertion of her agency, but there are strong instances within her interview that demonstrate the retention of such agency. Underpinning both Harriet and Victoria's assertions of agency there is belief, a belief that what they are doing and how they are practicing is right. This alludes to a sense of an 'Historical I' within them, that they have brought 'an amalgam of persuasions' (Peshkin, 1988a:17), a sense of identity that is not lost within the 'Enforced I', but can struggle to breathe at times. This is also evident within 'Target Driven I'.

### Target Driven I

An important reason for reflecting on the development of an interpretation is to show the way a researcher's self, or identity in a situation intertwines with his or her understanding of the object and the investigation. (Peshkin, 2000: 5)

Reflection has played a key part in my research; one of the most significant moments of reflection came during my time as 'Target Driven I', when a member of my doctoral action learning set prompted me to reform my thinking. It was a time when I was frustrated and blinkered by the pressures of performativity; here, I explore what that looked like for other teachers and whether the assertion of agency is possible in this situation. Were others as blinkered or frustrated as I was, or did they find manoeuvrability and awareness of their potential agency?

Closely linked with 'Enforced I', 'Target Driven I' is apparent in Victoria, Harriet and Anna's interviews. During my experience as 'Target Driven I', I was under pressure to

demonstrate my worth as a teacher by achieving certain results for my pupils. It was at this stage that I had some understanding of Ball's (2003) depiction of Diane and Chloe; I felt as though I was 'ensconced in collecting data' in order to prove my value as a teacher, and there was no room for an assertion of my agency. In Chapter 4, my analysis and reflection on such instances allowed an alternative perspective and suggested that there had been more room for manoeuvrability than first considered. At the time I was blinkered by the constraints that I felt were oppressing me and in my frustration at the situation I did not allow myself time to reflect or to take an alternative view; it took an outsider's comments to take me out of my bubble of vexation and to reassess my thinking. This is what I looked for in the data, past the implementation of target setting and assessment, as is a given within today's education system, and instead to the reaction and effect on that teacher's agency.

Anna's impression as a PGCE student was that 'assessment [is] driving everything'; she expressed concern about maintaining her 'values in a pressured environment'. This immediately highlights the negative feeling that is apparent among teachers with respect to assessment and target setting. In Chapter 4, my journal entries illustrated the frustration and pressure that I felt as a result of performativity, a common feeling amongst teachers according to Ball (2003). Victoria talks about the way in which it has altered her practice: 'we've had to move towards target setting and I can tell I'm working in a different way.' The concern for Victoria is not the focus on assessment, but what is potentially being lost in doing so:

People are having progress meetings...everything is about how much progress the child has made, then you're creating child concern sheets if they're not quite making the correct progress. So even though I would try and say that I am still open and try and incorporate a very creative curriculum in the school, I don't think they have as much autonomy as they used to.

The unease is not about identifying children who are not making progress, but the time that is spent ensuring progress in certain areas, such as numeracy and literacy which may mean that pupils may not encounter 'experiences that they may never have had'. In Victoria's context as a head teacher, there is a real sense of loss that target setting imposes, and although in agreement with reasons behind it - 'it ensures that across the

school things are taught in a consistent manner'- her ideals of providing a creative curriculum are somewhat hindered. When I asked Harriet about the pressures of Ofsted and how this filtered into her classroom and if it had influenced her teaching, she offered a different perspective:

Yeah, because it has to...I think in some ways our school, our head especially, she knows that she has to work within the parameters of Ofsted...but she likes to choose the bits that are significant for our context and she focuses on that; and at the moment, and this is relevant and important, our focus is the relationship we have with the children.

In Harriet's account, instead of quashing and restricting the values of the head teacher, such targets forced what she felt was important to the forefront of the school's concerns. Harriet uses the word 'choose' and phrases such as 'parameters of Ofsted' which suggests less rigidity than the imposition felt by Victoria. When talking about performativity, Victoria comments on 'how we impose all of these lesson observations'. Looking at Harriet and Victoria's accounts it could be argued that this phrase is key in understanding the interpretation and implementation of policy; it is how it is imposed within the school context which affects a teacher's sense of agency.

Interpretation is an act of imagination and logic. It entails perceiving importance, order, and form in what one is learning that relates to the argument, story, narrative that is continually undergoing creation. (Peshkin, 2000:9)

Peshkin is speaking here about the researcher's interpretation but I feel that it is also relevant to the interpretation of policy. The senior leaders must 'perceive importance' and 'order and form' what that will look like within the school. They create arguments for and against policy and, in Victoria's case, create a narrative for the school. In turn, the class teacher weaves that narrative into their classroom; Harriet appears more agentic in this context because she is in agreement with how senior management have implemented policy. Their decisions mean that Harriet feels that her focus is on her relationship with the children, which in turn marries with her values and adds to her narrative: 'I wanted to make a difference'. In contrast, Victoria feels as though she is being forced away from her values and the way in which she would like to teach. Here

she speaks of the pressures to allot more time to the teaching of literacy and numeracy, which she feels takes away from the creative subjects.

I tried in my school again to have a creative timetable, yes with some structure with the literacy and numeracy; but I felt even with the introduction of that, it was like another half an hour taken off the timetable because it was important to teach that discreetly as well, to ensure that our children were performing in those particular things.

Ball argued that within such a performative society 'beliefs are no longer important, it is the output that counts' (2003:223); there are both contradictions of and agreements with this statement in Harriet and Victoria's accounts. There is a consensus that assessment and target setting is at the forefront of a school's decision-making process, which is particularly evident in Victoria's case and how such target setting can influence how and what is taught in the classroom. However, in both cases beliefs are not lost and neither deem beliefs to be unimportant. Once again, there appears to be a Peshkin-like 'Intrinsic Identity' that determines whether they feel at ease with their situation.

A further example of this can be found in Anna's account; Anna's ambitions were to 'create a supportive environment' and therefore she described feeling uncomfortable when assessment seemed to be at the forefront of her teaching practice:

They were all told what level they were at, you know, which I didn't really agree with because they were only seven. So, you know, I think it's important for children to know where they're going and their learning, but I found that this was, sort of, a little bit too far in terms of assessment driving everything.

Once again when beliefs and values did not marry with her practice values, she 'didn't really agree' with the focus on assessment at such a young age and feelings of unease are apparent. In these accounts, to be agentic in a 'Target Driven I' context is challenging; consideration has to be given to adherence of policy and the transparency of league tables and assessment data. As in the example of Lucy in journal entries 6a and 6b performativity did lead to restrictions in Lucy's pedagogy and real concern about how she was to be perceived as a teacher should she not show accelerated learning. Lucy appeared less able to find manoeuvrability within this context whereas Harriet was

afforded more opportunity to work within the remit of her values and beliefs. It was the interpretation of Harriet's head teacher that allowed her to do so, highlighting the importance of context and the complexities of individual schools. In these examples, the difficulty in the assertion of agency lies within proving the worth of the school or teacher, in the form of assessment data, and the way in which those results are achieved. Victoria also felt restricted by what was imposed on her by target setting and in turn this filtered into her school's classrooms leading to her opinion that her teachers did not 'have as much autonomy as they used to'. Harriet gives more hope to the idea that there is more wriggle room within a 'Target Driven I' context and also highlights the perspective of both senior management and class teachers, is key in the interpretation and delivery of policy.

### Social Worker I

In my exploration of my own subjectivity, I found that despite the focus on targets and assessment, meaningful relationships with children were not lost and served as a reminder of what school meant to some children. Harriet echoes this and discussed the issue of being a low achieving school compared to the surrounding area:

If you compare the two areas it's ridiculous because you're talking about children who come to school, who have never even picked up a book and don't know how to sit down and generally haven't been toilet trained and have no social skills. So at our school we spend a lot of time spending time with the children, talking about how to be social before we even start on the learning. So you're already on a back foot every year as a result of that.

There is a sense of ownership in what Harriet says: 'at our school' and the use of 'we' illustrates that she feels as though her school operates in a different way to those in the area. Harriet locates herself as part of the school and as driver of their way of being. She acknowledges that this puts pressure on achievement in terms of assessment data, but continues that: 'we know that our children have come a massive way'. Victoria also recognises the difficulties of educating in a deprived area:

In the type of school I'm working in, which is in a deprived area, you know, results are difficult and I am working in a very affluent, very high achieving authority.



Second highest achieving authority across the country. So in a school like mine, you know, I'm working alongside head teachers who are achieving incredibly high results, feeling pressure from my peers, feeling pressure from the authority.

Both Harriet and Victoria recognise the difficulty in demonstrating their worth and asserting agency in areas of high deprivation. The unmeasurable, social aspects are likely where the children will make the most progress, and they are compared with schools where family and home life may be more supportive. From Harriet's account, her head teacher seems to be accepting of this and although results and pressure are an issue, Harriet states that, initially, the focus is on the social aspects of the children's education. Victoria, however, continues by talking about target setting as discussed above. In both cases the social concerns of children in their care present more pressure, but in Harriet's case this also creates a sense of the school's identity; it is different from other schools in the area, but there is a sense of pride when Harriet speaks about it. There is an understanding that they are forced to move away from how other schools in the area educate their children, but this is for the benefit of the children and that is what takes priority. Throughout Harriet's interview there is a strong sense of 'us' and 'them', a show of solidarity with the majority of the decisions her head teacher has made. Her agreement with the head teacher's approach and what she feels is right for the children gives her a sense of ownership of her practice, even if it is under the school's umbrella of policy and procedures. In comparison, at the top of the hierarchy at her school, although able to take ownership of policy and its implementation, Victoria's account suggests her sense of agency is lessened with heightened pressure of social issues. Perhaps because Victoria in a position of greater responsibility she has to make more difficult decisions about how her actions and beliefs can marry. As a researcher, Peshkin states,

I manipulated my behaviour, blending in like a chameleon when invisibility was in order and appearing in this or that posture when I needed to produce a particular effect. (Peshkin, 1984: 258)

There are similarities between Peshkin as a researcher and Victoria as a head teacher; she feels the need to blend in with other schools and in this sense, assessment data has the potential to make her invisible if targets are met. However, there is a struggle for

Victoria's values to be realised within the pressures of keeping up with other schools in the area, and for her to 'appear' and assert her agency; she comments that she has 'always been about what's right for the children' but marrying her beliefs and reality proves difficult.

### Creative I

After reflecting on my own analysis of 'Creative I', the opportunity for creative teaching seemed to be representative of a sense of freedom. Adam in Chapter 4 attempted to be 'creative', alluding to going against the grain and allowing a teacher to experiment away from the confines of assessment and performativity. Anna describes being creative as making 'learning quite hands on' and not having 'to have everything recorded in books to go to my deputy head on a Friday.' In the exploration of my 'Creative I' in Chapter 3, I resonate with Anna's notions about creativity. I comment that my 'Creative I' is accompanied with senior management's 'tremendous sense of trust in staff and their pedagogy'. Anna was able to realise her 'Creative I' in her second placement, a private school where she was allowed more freedom away from the curriculum: 'there's a lot more chance to be creative'. In her account, she comments on the importance of teaching in a creative manner, linking this with why she wanted to come into teaching:

Why I wanted to come into teaching, it was to make a really interactive and fun learning experience that the children really enjoyed being part of'

Previously she had voiced concerns about assessment: 'I just wonder whether I'll get caught up with thinking about the outcomes' and comments: 'it's having a fine balance of both, so that concerns me, and I just wonder how I'll handle that in the classroom.'

Her concern is realised in Victoria's account: creativity appears to be what she aspires to have and is fighting to achieve in her battle against performativity. Victoria credits 'a very strong head teacher' who she worked under, as a key influence on her practice. Victoria comments that this head teacher knew 'exactly what she wanted and what she believed was right for the children in the school.' From her comments below, the aspect that Victoria appears to admire the most is this head teacher's creativity:

She was incredibly creative and she looked at the curriculum from a very different perspective, and although it kind of incorporated things that the

national curriculum wanted, she was able to tailor that to the children in a very creative manner which is what I really liked.

Victoria admires the ability of her previous head teacher to take ownership of government documents, perceiving creativity in this sense as freedom to assert agency and align pedagogy within one's beliefs and values. Victoria reinforces this notion by stating that seeing how this head teacher managed such contradictions in her workplace, in turn, influenced her own practice:

That was quite influential in how I worked, that I didn't always feel that...I had to go with what everyone else was doing and I didn't always follow the norm.

In this account, the government represents 'the norm' and anything that veers away from the norm could be viewed as being creative. Throughout the rest of Victoria's account, she mentions the struggle between the desire to establish a creative timetable and the constraints that restrict her within academic requirements and targets. In my data, the 'Creative I' affords the practitioner with the most agency and manoeuvrability. The sense of agency is heightened because creativity allows the teacher to step away from performativity and to teach in an unprescribed manner. Victoria aspires to allow her teachers to be more creative and to incorporate a more creative curriculum but finds the pressures as 'Target Driven I' and 'Enforced I' difficult to wriggle free from. It contradicts her previous comments about moulding teachers into a certain way of being and illustrates a clear tension between control and agency. Creativity suggests a removal from a performative regime but does that have to be the case? Can creativity and in turn, a greater sense of agency still be achieved within our education system?

#### [A return to research questions](#)

This chapter has enabled a deeper exploration of the data in relation to my 'Situational Identities', in which I have shown that all four interviewees had a clear sense of what is right and how they want to and should be teaching. In each 'Situational I' the growth and reshaping of pedagogy is evident. In some accounts, such as Victoria's reaction to the pressures of attainment, the reshaping of pedagogy is unwelcome and is forced upon her in order to achieve results; in this instance, Peshkin's notions on the exploration of one's subjectivity could be applied and one could argue that her context

does not marry with her 'Historical I', leaving her feeling uncomfortable and unhappy with the reshaping of her practice. In the analysis of my 'Situational Identities', the contexts in which I felt most comfortable were when my 'Historical I' and 'Situational I' were in agreement. Peshkin felt 'a warm feeling' (1988a:18) from those who upheld their ethnicity in Riverview, because he understood them and identified with it; where the 'Intrinsic' and 'Situational I' meets, is where the 'warm feelings' are apparent. This was also true for myself and my interviewees, when their beliefs and 'Intrinsic' sense of what they felt a teacher should be, was satisfied within their 'Situational Identity', there was an identification with their situation and a sense of stability that their beliefs and values were being adhered to. However, this does not mean that agency was absent when they were forced to work in a way in which they had not intended, I will expand on this in Chapter 6.

I now return to my research questions, and consider each in turn, in the light of the analysis of these two chapters.

*What is the nature of teacher agency in a performative context: to what extent do teachers experience their work as agentic and what role does this play in their sense of self as a teacher?*

The nature of teacher agency as illustrated within my data is highly dependent on the teacher's positionality and perceptions within the context in which they are working. There are instances of ownership and control woven into the mechanisms of a performative education system in both the journal entries and interviews. As a head teacher, Victoria views her agency as being able to mould others into her way of being, and to create a school which operates in line with her vision for how a school should be run. When Victoria's agency is asserted, the teachers who work within her school are potentially restricted. Victoria is dictated to by the local authority and the measurable data they require; this data affects the way in which other professionals and Victoria herself perceive the school's worth. In comparison, Harriet is reliant on senior management to afford her a sense of agency, thus illustrating the importance of positionality. The exploration of my 'Situational I's' also supports this, with each new context presenting a different position within the school which also led to changes in perception.

Perception has played a key role in exploring the nature of agency within my research: perception of a teacher's self-worth, perception of control and the concern for how others may perceive you. For example, Harriet's perception of self-reflection time was that she was in control and that gave her a sense of ownership of her practice. What an outsider may see and what she felt may be two different things, but what is important is her perception of the situation. As 'Target Driven I', I perceived myself as having no autonomy and I felt that targets and assessment requirements were of no benefit to anyone. My perception was altered by an outsider and although nothing about the situation had changed, I then saw things in a different way. How a teacher views the nature of their agency will affect how they experience and assert it.

The assertion of agency within my research is inextricably linked to the teacher's sense of self. Agency is asserted to reflect the teacher's beliefs and values, and this becomes evident in their practice. There is no doubt that teachers do not always find their work agentic but opportunities for agency will often be found precisely when the boundaries are restricted, and it is asserted in an attempt to maintain a sense of self and ownership. Teachers do appear to find space to work in a way in which they intended; for Victoria, this was to work in a creative manner and provide enjoyment in learning for the children in her school. For Harriet, it was to look at the child as a whole and to understand that education is not simply about grades, but to ensure that a child's social well-being is developed and cared for. This is not something that is easily done and often teachers will find their teaching sense of self restricted and oppressed in the quest to provide what is measurable. However, it is in making decisions about practice in these very circumstances that choice can become apparent.

*Where does agency lie within decision making? How are decisions made and what choices do teachers feel they have? How do those choices relate to the overall school context?*

My research has shown that the process of decision making is instrumental in the assertion of agency. This is an obvious observation, but decision making is also dependent on positionality and perception. For example, as an experienced teacher, I may not make the same decisions now that I did during my NQT year. If I were to be put back in the same context I do not think that I would behave in the same way and I would make different decisions; I will never know, but after years of reflection about my

experience at that school, I like to think that I would question authority more and not be afraid to say if I do not agree with the way in which I am being managed.

A teacher is confronted with a myriad of decisions to make every day: who to give the extension questions to, whether to go over a certain topic one more time, who needs to be assessed for learning difficulties; these all enable a teacher's practice and are part of their pedagogy, but my research is more concerned with decisions that affect the assertion of their agency. Such decision making often lies within the tensions and contradictions they experience working within a performative education system. Some decisions are necessary: for example, Harriet states that her school must focus on the social aspect of the children when they first join the school because no learning could be achieved until they have mastered basic social skills. Other decisions are harder: Victoria has to make decisions that disrupt her desire to maintain a creative timetable which affects her agency and makes her feel that she is working in a way in which she had not intended. Elements of choice lie within the decision-making process: Adam made a choice to go against the assistant head teacher's wishes and Victoria states that she will choose to say no to some initiatives. Some choices, as with Harriet, may be disguised and given the appearance of choice to afford the teacher with a sense of ownership, but it is questionable how much ownership they have. There are also times when choice is removed; despite Lucy's protestation about the assessment data, senior management refused to change it and she was forced to work in a way she would not have chosen.

Again, choice and decision making are highly dependent on the context and positionality of the teacher. Decision making lies within the tensions and contradictions of a teacher's practice and there are occasions when manoeuvrability is more visible than in others. A lot depends on the cost of agency to the teacher; Lucy was unable to find manoeuvrability in her situation because the cost of fighting against the assessment data would affect the school's figures and therefore the school's worth. When Adam was asserting his agency and made a choice to go against the assistant head teacher's wishes, it was of no consequence to any other member of staff or school as a whole; it was a safe assertion because it was limited to one lesson.

As a head teacher, Victoria is faced with harder decisions that affect the whole school and also how the school is perceived by her local authority; her position produces tensions between how she would like the school to be run and conforming to a higher authority. Her decisions then affect the teachers within her school and the choices they are able to make in their classrooms. Decisions are made in consideration of the teacher's sense of self, their context and positionality. Important decisions about pedagogy are often forced by the pressures of performativity which can sometimes afford the teacher with a sense of agency and sometimes leave them feeling oppressed. It is important to remember that decisions and choices can be made, but it is on reflection on a situation when teachers feel most in control and when they are able to make decisions that suit their sense of self and pedagogy.

*Are there particular acts or values that have significance?*

What has become evident from my research is the importance of reflection in the assertion of agency. Harriet and Victoria both credit reflection with informing their practice and reflection has enabled me to gain a new insight into my practice and where opportunities for agency lay. Reflection allows the teacher to reassess the situation and to step outside the bubble of frustration that often blinkers our view. In Victoria's quest to remain creative and provide a creative curriculum for her pupils, she must reflect on how to work it into her school within the parameters of performativity. Similarly, Harriet states that her head teacher chooses aspects which suit their school, suggesting that she has also reflected on how to manage performativity. Teachers are constantly required to demonstrate their worth using measurable data which is easy to get lost in; what the teachers in my research have shown is that their concern for the whole child, and the desire to make a difference in those children's lives, rules the way in which they try to assert their agency. They keep hold of their beliefs, and reflection on given contexts allows them to find the space and manoeuvrability to work them into their practice.

In the following chapter I explore how my findings, and the answers to my research questions, relate to Ball and his notions on performativity and a teacher's sense of self. I summarise the thesis and address what it has meant for me and also for those who may read it.

## Chapter 6 – The Insider’s Journey

This chapter draws the thesis to a close and I discuss what the journey has meant in terms of my research and for myself as a researcher. I begin by returning to Ball; I explored his ideas on teacher identity and the influence of policy in Chapter 2, and I revisit his concepts here and comment on what my research has shown in relation to his theory. I discuss what he allows in terms of teacher agency and how this compares to what my research has produced. The next section addresses the contribution to knowledge of this thesis, and I look to Peshkin to illustrate the methodological implications of using his approach for research. I explore the nature of interpretation and the importance of understanding one’s subjectivity; I comment on what this means, what it has meant for my research and how I have gained knowledge by applying Peshkin’s methods. I then reflect on my journey throughout this process: what have I learnt? What will this mean for me in the future? And has my research altered my behaviour? Finally, I comment on the implications my research has for others; what could a teacher take away from my research? And could there be any lessons for those in higher education?

### Bringing it back to Ball

In Chapter 2, I discussed Ball’s (1998, 2003, 2008, 2011a, 2011b, 2013) work on policy and his account of its impact on teachers’ agency and professional identity. He voiced concerns with the way in which teachers were affected by policy, and painted a picture of policy becoming all-consuming, leaving little room for independent thought or action. One of the key areas for discussion within his 2003 paper was the displacement of a teacher’s values and beliefs. However, Ball does not portray what I have seen within my interviews with Harriet, Victoria, Thea, Anna, and in my journal entries - that is, a very clear understanding of what our values are and our struggles to uphold them. Ball comments:

Within each of the policy technologies of reform there are embedded and required new identities, new forms of interaction and new values. What it means to teach and what it means to be a teacher (a researcher, an academic) are subtly but decisively changed in the process of reform. (2003:217)



As illustrated in Victoria's interview, there are occasions when she is required to teach in a different way, to include topics within the timetable that take away from a creative curriculum, and to act in accordance with new values developed in the form of assessment targets; but this did not take away from her core values which she repeatedly refers to throughout her interview.

Beliefs are no longer important – it is the output that counts. Beliefs are part of an older, increasingly displaced discourse. (Ball, 2003:223)

Ball's perspective is not the case for Victoria; her beliefs and values are very important, as they are for the other interviewees. What my research has shown is the clear presence of beliefs and values and the struggle to maintain them via the assertion of agency. As illustrated in the previous two chapters, Victoria speaks firmly about her values and her desire to provide a creative curriculum for the children. Harriet has a clear understanding of the teacher she would like to be and although she wavers under the Ofsted 'train of observation' she stands steadfast in her beliefs about what education means to her: 'our focus is the relationship we have with the children'. Anna knows what kind of teacher she wants to be, and my journal entries indicate the tensions and contradictions that are apparent when struggling to maintain one's beliefs and values. The analysis in this thesis does not present values as being unimportant; on the contrary, it is the teacher's values that provide the tensions and contradictions which enable the assertion of agency, and it is within this struggle that manoeuvrability can be found. New values are provided to teachers, for example, in the form of assessment targets, and within these values new discourse is developed, such as the language of levelling, but my analysis does not indicate that prior values are abandoned; the language of values, and the fight to uphold them, is still visible within my research.

Ball (2003) comments on the language of performativity and suggests that new discourse leaves little room for thought and is essentially a form of 'ventriloquism':

We learn to talk about ourselves and the relationships, purposes and motivations in these new ways. The new vocabulary of performance renders the old ways of thinking and relating dated or redundant or even obstructive. (2003:218)

My research shines a new light on the interpretation of 'new vocabulary'; considering journal entry 4 in Chapter 4, and the new way of thinking prompted by a member of my action learning set, the new vocabulary of performance does not always produce negative outcomes. Teachers experience new policies and are introduced to new ways of teaching throughout their career; the teachers I interviewed did not give up on their beliefs and values and yet the new language of performance could be viewed as informing their pedagogy. There will be aspects of the new language they may disagree with, but this affirms their stance as a teacher; taking parts of new discourse that they feel will work within the classroom and making decisions not to include certain aspects is an assertion of teacher agency. As in the case of Victoria and Harriet certain features of the discourse may be worked with, not swallowed whole.

Performativity is a large concern within my data, and Ball described it as being opposed to 'professional judgement and co-operation' (2003:218). There are elements within my research that support Ball's comments; for example, Lucy, in journal entry 6b describes a change in her pedagogy due to the pressures of levels and attainment. In this case, Lucy's judgement of the levels of the children is not considered; senior management make the decision that the previous levels, which could be deemed as unrealistic, were to be accepted leaving Victoria in a difficult position in terms of showing pupil progress. Victoria also speaks about having to 'work in a particular way', illustrating the influence performativity has on pedagogy. However, there is also strong evidence within my research which counters the overthrowing of professional judgment. As previously discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, Victoria's judgement on what she deemed to be important within her school is highly visible. Victoria states that she asserts her judgement and 'will actually say no to some things'. Victoria describes herself as a reflective practitioner; she endeavours to provide a creative curriculum for her pupils and although there are instances when she may be stifled, her professional judgement is not wholly discarded.

Similarly, Harriet speaks of her head teacher, alluding to her judgement and commenting that her head teacher 'chooses the bits that are significant'. This choice indicates the preserving of personal judgement and co-operation within policy; adherence to certain aspects of policy comes after the assertion of agency. There is an

element of choice where parts of policy are adhered to but while maintaining the school or teacher's identity. Although there is evidence within my data according with Ball's (2003) comments on the overthrowing of judgement in favour of performativity, the majority of my research portrays a more positive outlook. The prescriptive nature of performativity sets clear boundaries which create tensions and contradictions for those that work within them; it is in the management of these tensions that a teacher's agency lies, and their judgement and values allow them to make decisions and create space for developing their pedagogy. Ball argues that: 'judgement and authenticity within practice are sacrificed for impression and performance'; I do not see that within my research. I see teachers constantly judging their practice and sometimes struggling to let their beliefs rule their pedagogy. There are occasions when their judgement is oppressed or momentarily stifled, but it is ever present.

In Ball et al.'s (2011) later work, he affords teachers more autonomy and describes them as being 'agents in the mediation and enactment of policy'. This describes a stronger sense of agency and resonates with Victoria's experience. Ball et al. continue by stating:

... but at the same time a great deal of the meaning of teaching and its practice is now made up of policy concepts which have been sedimented over time in the language of teaching and which constitute the contours of professional practice and subjectivity. (2011:622)

Policy discourse is prevalent within my data; my journal entries discuss levelling and assessment criteria and the adherence to school policy. Victoria and Harriet's interviews are intertwined with the discourse of performativity and Anna is seen to rely on levels to ensure her worth. In her first placement, Anna was taught to think of children in terms of levels; the preoccupation of levels was a concern for her, especially when she had to discuss the levels with the children. It had become a large influence on her practice at that school but not one that sat well with her prior values. In her second practice she used that experience to move away from performativity and to allow herself to become more creative and to explore the kind of teacher she wanted to become. My research illustrates Ball et al.'s (2011) comments that the language of teaching appears to be permeated with policy concepts. Ball et al. state that 'most teachers are now fluent in policy but are spoken by it' (2011:622), ruling their practice and discourse. My research

demonstrates the heavy influence of policy, but it does not show that they are 'spoken by it'. Policy, in my research, is influential but it does not rule their discourse and practice. My research has shown that reflection is a key factor in the working of agency within policy and it is this reflection which allows the teacher to encompass their own language of beliefs and values within the policy discourse. If a teacher was to be spoken by policy discourse, my data would look different; the concern would only be about the measurable, the child's attainment and the measured self-worth of the teacher. There are elements of this but there is also a strong, personal discourse within the data; there are concerns about children's welfare and about providing more than what can be measured, in order to give a sense of security, social skills and understanding, to look at the child as a whole. These teachers are not spoken by policy, they are speaking as teachers who have to work with policy and understand the constraints and pressure that this produces.

There are elements of Ball's depiction of teachers within my research, and his work is important in highlighting the pressures that teachers face in today's education system. However, what I have seen in the process of writing this thesis is that the outlook is not as bleak as Ball depicts. There is oppression within performativity but within that oppression comes a desire for teachers to work in a way in which they intended, and for their beliefs and values to be present in their pedagogy. Their practice is influenced by new concepts and targets but data from my research indicates that the whole child is not forgotten; agency is present in the working of these situations and the teacher's sense of self can remain.

#### [Contribution to Knowledge – Putting Peshkin to work](#)

Peshkin's influence has been invaluable in the formation and enactment of research throughout this thesis. His concept of what it means to be researcher and how to conduct research persuaded me to take a personal journey during the research process and to allow for deeper insights and different avenues of interpretation.

An important reason for reflection on the development of an interpretation is to show the way a researcher's self, or identity in a situation, intertwines with his or her understanding of the object of the investigation. (Peshkin, 2000:5)

My research began with the exploration of my own 'Situational Identities'. After examining myself, I looked out to new data, letting it intertwine with my understanding then reflecting back on myself to reach a deeper understanding of the situation. For example, in Chapter 4, I examined my experiences as a student mentor and looked back to my 'Situational Identity' as 'Enforced I' to understand my actions and how this situation may have influenced my future practice. Without Peshkin's influence, I may not have studied myself in so much detail and such opportunities for reflexivity would have been missed. There is a level of understanding and analysis which has been reached in the application of Peshkin which necessitates the researcher seeking their own subjectivity and sense of self before conducting research on others. The complexity of understanding one's self, and the influence this may have on future work or thinking, encouraged deeper inquiry and new perspectives. Peshkin comments on

the way that a developing interpretation and the identity of orientation of the researcher evolve over the course of the research project. (2000:5)

This thesis illustrates the personal journey and reflexive thinking that Peshkin's methods require in order to conduct what he believes to be meaningful research. I have detailed the interpretation of my identity and how this has been relevant and important in the analysis of my data. Peshkin's methods allow the researcher to be explicit about the research journey. A lot of what is researched and then analysed by the researcher is based on interpretation, their perception of what they deem to be significant and what statements or comments are profound. Peshkin states that 'interpretation is an act of imagination' (2000:9); the researcher's mind is responsible for the organisation of the research:

It entails perceiving importance, order, and form in what one is learning that relates to the argument, story, narrative that is continually undergoing creation. (Peshkin, 2000:9)

Drawing on Peshkin's notions in exploring my own subjectivity meant that the reader was privy to the construction of the story and narrative of the thesis. These methods illuminated a multi-layered understanding of myself as a researcher and the context of what was researched; the process was made visible and therefore charted the insider's

journey, detailing the influences on how outsider information was received and reflected on.

Peshkin recognises the importance of the researcher's subjectivity, providing a means whereby it genuinely becomes part of the research instead of simply paying lip service to it; the researcher's persuasions are intertwined and made visible during the data collection and analysis. The researcher and research are never separated; Peshkin identifies that the qualities of the researcher:

have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project. (1988a:17)

Peshkin alerted me to my subjectivity and I became aware of the silent influences different contexts and experiences had on me, both personally, in my teaching career, and as a researcher. I sought out my 'Intrinsic Identity' and was able to recognise how agreements and conflicts with my intrinsic sense of 'I' affected my interpretation of different contexts. In using a genuine application of Peshkin's ideas, my research and stance as a researcher has been highlighted and has enabled me to provide a personal narrative, alerting the reader to changes in my thinking and to be reflexive. I aimed to give 'credence to the contextual nature which both researchers and their research phenomena provide' (Peshkin, 1988b:418). To do so, I questioned the influences different contexts and situations had on my research subjects, and with the knowledge of my own 'Situational identities' I was able to comment on similarities and contradictions between myself and the subjects and explore why these differences or similarities occurred. Such an awareness prompted a deeper level of questioning and analysis; conducting research in this reflexive manner enabled me to 'capture the surprise, disorder and contradictions of a phenomenon' (Peshkin, 1988b: 418); and it was within the contradictions that I found the answers to my research questions.

Peshkin's work on the nature and application of qualitative inquiry is of significant importance to researchers because of the way in which the researcher becomes part of the narrative. The researcher conveys the results of inquiry and conducts the research, but without inquiring about themselves and making the reader privy to this study, their interpretation and influence over a study is unclear. Peshkin's insights into methodology

encourage the researcher to seek out their own subjectivity and to question how they shape their research. What cool and warm spots are apparent in the collection of their data? Why do they interpret a situation or piece of data in a certain way? And what implications might this have on the body of their research? From conducting study in this way, I have learned new things about myself, and as a researcher I am more aware of my subjectivity, and this has encouraged me to be more reflexive in my thinking. My perception has altered and new ways of interpreting data were revealed; in terms of subjectivity, 'acknowledgements and assertions are not sufficient' (Peshkin, 1988a: 17) Peshkin's method calls for a genuine exploration of subjectivity, for the researcher to value the importance of interpretation, and for the reasons for their interpretation to be made fully visible to the reader.

### *Summary of key findings*

**What is the nature of teacher agency in a performative context: to what extent do teachers experience their work as agentic and what role does this play in their sense of self as a teacher?**

The nature of teacher agency is highly dependent on the teacher's positionality and perceptions within the context in which they are working. There are instances of ownership and control within the mechanisms of a performative education system. Perception is also key and the way in which the teacher views their sense of self; opportunities for agency will often be found precisely when the boundaries are restricted, and it is asserted in an attempt to maintain a sense of self and ownership.

**Where does agency lie within decision making? How are decisions made and what choices do teachers feel they have? How do those choices relate to the overall school context?**

The process of decision making is instrumental in the assertion of agency which is also dependent on positionality and perception. Such decision making often lies within the tensions and contradictions they experience working within a performative education system; there are occasions when manoeuvrability is more visible than in others. Important decisions about pedagogy are often forced by the pressures of performativity which can sometimes afford the teacher with a sense of agency and sometimes leave

them feeling oppressed. It is important to remember that decisions and choices can be made, but it is on reflection about a situation when teachers feel most in control and when they are able to make decisions that suit their sense of self and pedagogy.

### **Are there particular acts or values that have significance?**

Reflection has played a key part in my research and has shown that it allows the teacher to reassess the situation, and to step outside the bubble of frustration that often blinkers our view. Teachers in my research have expressed concern for the whole child, and the desire to make a difference in those children's lives; it is this that rules the way in which they try to assert their agency. They keep hold of their beliefs, and reflection on given contexts and events allows them to find the space and manoeuvrability to work them into their practice.

### **Reflections from the inside out**

I started this journey eight years ago, before my two children, and at a time when I felt that policy ruled my pedagogy. My previous writing, illustrated in some of my journal entries, portrays frustration and anger, feeling that assessment and targets were producing unnecessary pressure on me, and in turn, on the children in my class. I felt the game of chasing targets was unjust, that in the quest to be viewed as an 'outstanding' teacher results could be skewed, and the validity of assessment data could be questioned. I became highly stressed and anxious about achieving the correct levels, I was blinkered in my view, blinded by performativity. I fully sympathised with Ball's views on policy and I felt that his work reflected the teacher life that I was living.

The writing of this thesis has slowly led me out of my frustrated bubble. I have been able to step outside my restricted view and shone light on areas of previous darkness. I was so fixated with certain aspects of chasing data that I could not see the other options that were there for me. What I have realised in the exploration of myself, is that the nature of my 'Historical I' and my desire to please has constrained my thinking; there have been occasions in my teaching career when I have become so fully consumed with wanting to achieve that I have missed opportunities to find space for manoeuvrability. Previously, I have been too rigid in my thinking, and afraid to step out and assert myself, for fear of failing.



I have learnt new things about myself and how past contexts have shaped my actions and my pedagogy. I knew that my NQT placement would have had an effect on my practice, but it was not until I compared myself to other teachers that I could see the difference, and that also allowed me to question why. For example, the difference in the assistant head's approach, in journal entries 5b and 5c informing Adam about his practice, illuminated how reluctant I was in the role of an enforcer. In previous reading and analysis of that journal entry, I had not realised this about myself; I gained a new perspective on my actions and how they have been shaped.

Within my analysis, three key factors were apparent in the assertion of agency: reflection, perspective and the set boundaries which create tensions and contradictions within a teacher's practice. Harriet and Victoria both specifically noted reflection as being a significant part of their practice. As previously discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, Harriet found a sense of ownership within self-reflection time and this apparent freedom of thought allowed her to feel in control of her practice. Victoria referred to herself as a reflective practitioner on more than one occasion and she portrayed herself as a thoughtful head teacher who was striving to provide creativity within the parameters of performativity. My reflections have led me to see previous incidents in a new light; reflecting on past situations with new knowledge has afforded me with a greater sense of understanding and allowed me to step outside of my constricted view to see the bigger picture. In turn, this has led me to understand the importance of perspective and that one's perspective can be altered with knowledge and the appreciation of different opinions.

Harriet's perception of her self-reflection time was that it afforded her a sense of ownership over her practice; it did not matter that to an outsider that this could be viewed as a mechanism, contrived by senior management, to give the appearance of autonomy. What mattered was Harriet's perception of the situation and the sense of control it gave her. My previous perceptions were challenged in the exploration of the data and I gained an awareness of the way in which the same incident can be viewed from different perspectives, how the past can affect your perceptions, and the importance of trying to step outside of yourself and the context you are in, to see a different view. A certain degree of detachment is needed to understand one's

perception of a given situation: emotions must be let go and replaced with questions as to why that emotion was apparent and what may have caused it. At the time of writing my journal entries about assessment, I was in emotive state, feeling as though I was being ruled by performativity; it is only when I was able to let go of those emotions and have an outsider question my perception, that I was able to understand the context in a new way. I now recognise that looking to the outside to inform your insider knowledge is important in the formation of new perspectives.

I discovered that agency lay within the tensions and contradictions certain contexts created and it was in the management of these tensions that agency became apparent and there was space for manoeuvrability. What also became clear is that if the boundaries are not clearly marked, it becomes harder to know where the space lies and therefore harder to assert agency. For example, during my time as an NQT a lot was left unspoken; there was a silent threat and the boundaries were often unclear. There were other reasons, already discussed, that contributed to my compliant nature at this time, but as seen from journal entry 2 I was not the only member of staff to feel this way. Because the boundaries were not set, the parameters for manoeuvrability were unclear. It was in the clear, prescriptive boundaries that my subjects asserted their agency and found space for ownership and autonomy. This was not always easy and not all situations allowed for what the subject wanted, but without clear boundaries it becomes more difficult.

The writing of this thesis has made me more reflective; it has made me question why I react to certain situations in the way I do and to manage feelings of conflict in a more thoughtful manner. I know that feelings of frustration may constrict my view and when those feelings become apparent it is important to look to the outside. I am more aware of myself, what the influences on my practice have been and how this has affected me as a person, and in a professional capacity. It has been a highly personal journey in which the exploration of the self has given me a deeper understanding of my qualities and weaknesses, and which will form a significant part of my future understanding and decision making.

### Limitations of this research

It must be noted that there are limitations to the research that I conducted. My research was carried out on a small scale, data was collected from four interviewees and my own journal entries were used as part of the data. Were there more time and scope for a larger research project, I would wish to extend the research to a higher number of interviews, with teachers in a range of positions within schools. My research involved teachers at different stages of their career and with different statuses within schools, but wider research could be done comparing larger groups of each role. Opinions of children were not sought in my research; future study could also question pupils directly on the implications policy has on teaching. I addressed the insider approach of the teacher by using my journal entries to inform my research, one step further would be to explore the opinions of the students.

There was only one interviewee who worked in a secondary school and therefore the majority of my enquiry and research is only applicable to primary teaching; there may be different concerns, such as behaviour, in secondary school research. Further study to explore the differences and similarities in the assertion of agency in both settings, may produce different findings. My research also did not address the geographical implications of schools and the influence this may have on the interpretation and enactment of government policy, and thus teacher agency. Having worked in both affluent and deprived areas this also something that could be explored in greater depth. Three out of the four interviewees were working in deprived areas and there was reference made by two interviewees to the difference in pupil achievement in the local, more affluent areas; if pupil achievement is greater, and the pupils achieve the required levels more readily, does that allow the teacher more manoeuvrability within the classroom, or is performativity and the pressure of policy still present? These are questions that could be explored in more depth if more research was undertaken to interview more teachers from contrasting economic areas.

As referred to in Chapter 3, there are also limitations in the methods used when conducting my research. I took a qualitative approach and my data comprises of stories told to me by individuals and the story I tell about myself. There is always the question of truth in such research and I must acknowledge that the narrative of my interviewees

is their own interpretation of the situation. Similarly, my journal entries are my version of events; other people who were involved in incidents that I describe, may have a different memory or version of such happenings. Using Peshkin's notions on subjectivity, I have endeavoured to make the reader aware of my subjectivity and to use it as a reflective tool to examine prior perspectives and to colour reflections on new data. Therefore, although the personal data may be considered as limiting, it has been used in a way that illuminates new understanding and does not hinder the reflective process.

#### Implications of the study – a room with a view

If I were to question what a teacher could take from my research, I would firstly highlight the importance of understanding yourself. Peshkin's notions on subjectivity have meant I have gained an awareness of myself which will enable me to reflect more deeply on future situations. I would ask teachers to question what has influenced their practice and to look in to themselves to gain a better view on how they perceive their context. Questioning what has influenced practice and pedagogy establishes a greater sense of self-awareness which aids the process of reflection. As previously noted, reflection was a key factor in the assertion of agency, because it allows the exploration of perception and enables the subject to look out with a different view. Giving teachers time to reflect in an already crammed timetable is not something that is going to be achievable in all schools, but future study could explore the link between self-reflection and agency. Harriet credits her successes to the way in which she describes senior management organising self-reflection time; it would be interesting to see if this would work in other schools and conduct case studies to investigate whether self-reflection and autonomy are intertwined. Does it always enable agency? How can it be managed in a way that is not enforced and what effect will it have on pedagogy within the school?

For those in higher education and involved in teacher training, I would recommend that student teachers are made aware of their positionality when writing about a topic they are impassioned about. I have discovered that feelings of emotion can constrict one's perception; when feelings of anger or frustration are present, it is necessary to step outside the situation, look to the outside and the bigger picture to gain a stronger sense of perspective. In the performative culture in which we live, I have discovered that it is very easy to become ensconced in data and not always see the options available.

Teachers need to understand that there will be feelings of oppression, days when the sense of self seems to have been quashed, but it is still there. Beliefs and values need to be worked back into difficult contexts by means of self-reflection and gaining a different perspective; the self can remain, it is the positionality of the teacher and the way in which they manage their conflicts which will allow the assertion of their agency over their practice.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A - Example letter of consent for interview

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am currently undertaking a research project for my Doctorate of Education thesis, to investigate the influences on a teacher's agency within the classroom.

I would value your input and would like to invite you to take part in an interview. I would also ask you to consider granting me permission to use audio recording for the interview. With your consent, the interview will be transcribed, and recordings will be deleted after transcription. The transcriptions will form part of the data for the thesis and will be analysed.

All names will be changed before the final draft is submitted and no school names or locations will be named.

Before you decide if you would like to take part in this research, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Yours sincerely,

Rebecca Newton

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I am aware of the purpose of this study and I have been given the researcher's contact details if I need further information.

My signature confirms that I have decided to participate having read and understood the information given and had the opportunity to ask questions.

I ..... give my permission for my data to be used as part of this study and understand that I can withdraw at any time and my data will be destroyed.

Signature .....

## Appendix B- Example letter of consent for school based journal entries

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am currently undertaking a research project for my Doctorate of Education thesis, to investigate the influences on a teacher's agency within the classroom.

I would value your permission to be able to write about relevant occurrences or conversations I have within school. Such occurrences will be written up and conversations transcribed from notes. These notes, in the form of journal entries, will form part of the data for the thesis and will be analysed.

All staff names will be changed before the final draft is submitted, and no school names or locations will be named.

Before you decide if you would like to take part in this research, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Yours sincerely,

Rebecca Newton

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I am aware of the purpose of this study and I have been given the researcher's contact details if I need further information.

My signature confirms that I have decided to participate having read and understood the information given and had the opportunity to ask questions.

I ..... give my permission for school data to be used as part of this study and understand that I can withdraw at any time and my data will be destroyed.

Signature .....

## Appendix C – Semi structured interview questions

### Head teacher questions

#### **Questions to guide the interview**

- Could just let me know how long you've been teaching and a brief overview of your career.
- Over the course of that time what do you feel have been the main influences on your practice and how do you think this has affected you influences on other's practice now being a head and managing others?
- In your experience, in terms of management how useful are other government documents such as OFSTED guidelines, national curriculum? Do you think that they help to structure a teacher's identity?
- If there was a new teacher, say starting at your school in September what do you think in your opinion would be the main influences on that teacher's identity starting in September

### PGCE student questions

#### **Questions to guide the interview**

- You have nearly completed your PGCE, did you have any idea of what kind of teacher you wanted to be at the start of your course?
- Has anything changed in terms of what you wanted to be?
- In the state school experience, if you were planning say a weeks' worth of lessons, what was influencing your planning? What did you have to go through, what did you feel you needed to do?
- How does that compare with the private system?
- Is there anything that you think could prove difficult when you have your own class?

- After your experience this year is there anything that concerns you about when you have your own class and how you will be able to maintain your values?
- Have you experienced a difference in the autonomy in the classroom between the private and the state system?

### Supply teacher questions

#### **Questions to guide the interview**

- Can you let me know how long you've been teaching for and where you are in terms of your career at the moment?
- How do you feel about the National Curriculum? Is it something you use, or do you have more freedom being a supply teacher?
- In your experience do you think there is a difference between permanent and supply teachers do you feel you are perceived differently in the classroom?
- There has been a lot of government focus on assessment and targets, as a supply teacher do you think you feel the same kind of pressure as somebody in a permanent post? How has it affected you?
- In your experience do you think there is slightly more freedom for supply teachers than teachers in permanent posts?
- Throughout your teaching career, do you feel you have held on to your own pedagogical beliefs from when you first started teaching? If you feel they have changed over the years, do you feel that's through your choice or through other influences?

### Part time teacher questions

#### **Questions to guide the interview**

- Can you give me a brief overview of your career and what your current position is in school?

- Having worked as a full time teacher do you think that the influences on your practice have changed after going part time?
- In the media it has been well documented that teachers have felt pressured by government targets. Have you felt any such pressure and do you think this has affected your practice?
- Do you feel you have the same autonomy in the classroom as you did when you worked full time? If there has been a change is there anything in particular which has influenced this?

#### Full time teacher questions

#### Questions to guide the interview

- Can you give me a brief overview of you career so far and what stage you are at now?
- What do you feel were the main influences on your practice during the start of your career?
- Did this change throughout the later stages? If so what influenced these changes?
- Do you feel you have maintained the values and beliefs you had at the beginning or your career?
- In your previous job what did you feel were the main influences on your practice?]
- Are these influences still in effect in your new job?
- Do you feel your autonomy has changed within the classroom moving from state to private school? If yes how so?



## Appendix D - Interview transcript extracts

Anna PGCE student

Me: You've nearly completed your PGCE, did you have any idea of what kind of teacher you wanted to be at the start of your course?

Anna: I knew why I wanted to come into teaching... I knew that I wanted to work within a certain age range and that was 5 to 8 year olds. I knew that I wanted to... help children who felt excluded in the classroom and that comes from my own previous experience as a child... so I guess I knew I wanted to create a supportive environment and that was one of my drivers for coming into education.

Me: Ok

Anna: So I knew that I wanted to be a supportive teacher.

Me: Has anything changed in terms of what you wanted to be?

Anna: I think as I have gotten to understand more about the role of a teacher, because I think when I first decided to come into, or wanted to pursue a career in teaching, I think I really didn't know what the full role entailed. And it wasn't until I started my PGCE that I really understood the full role of a teacher... so I think that in terms of how I want to be with the children and my own values haven't changed ok? My values are still very much the same as what I came in with, but I have thought more about how I can maintain those values with the current challenges in teaching.

Me: What do you think those challenges are? And what do you mean by full role of a teacher? How is that different from what you...

Anna: ...I think I didn't realise that... that a role of a teacher wouldn't just be what you see in the classroom during the day. The fact is, it's a lot deeper than that and there's a lot of work that has to go on behind the scenes that... and obviously... with changes in teaching, you know? And requirements in teaching constantly changing. For example you know all the assessment and all the things that need to happen in and around the, the classroom and the day in the classroom. That's where my understanding has changed, like in the sense that I've I understood the role of a teacher isn't just what you see...

Me: Yes

Anna: ...in the classroom

Me: Yes

Anna: But it's constantly understanding, assessing, monitoring and erm, I suppose doing that for every single child in your class. I guess I have thought more about how I can maintain those values in a pressured environment where for example I'm not having if I'm working in certain schools. Or if I'm working in the state sector where I'm not having enough, enough chance to teach or I'm restricted by time or you know I don't have the support I need in the classroom. And can I? You know, I guess I'm thinking how I can live those values through...

Me: ...Yes...

Anna: ...and make sure I'm the best I can be for those children all the time...

Me: ...Yeah...

Anna: ...when there are all those pressures surrounding me. In essence it's made me think more about how...I can try and be happy within myself, because I came into this career to get personal satisfaction from trying to live the values that I believe in.

Me: Ok, thank you. What have been the main influences on your teaching this year?

Anna: Erm, [exhale of breath] from all school experiences? Or...

Me: Yes

Anna: Though it might be different in the different schools, so if they are different in different schools then... you want to hear about it.

Victoria - head teacher

Me: If you could let me know how long you've been teaching and a brief overview of your career.

Victoria: I've been teaching for thirteen years, four of those as a head teacher in a primary school in Altrincham, nine of those in different schools. Different types of schools within different authorities, which probably impacted on the type of school I then chose to become a head teacher of. I was a deputy for three years in Salford...quite a difficult school in a deprived area. Prior to that I taught in a very affluent area in Cheshire. Comparing the two I realised that my strengths lay in working with children with some difficulties in terms of behaviour, with some difficult families where there's high deprivation and so that's why I chose to work in the school where I am now.

Me: Over the course of that time what do you feel have been the main influences on your practice and how do you think this has affected you influences on other's practice now being a head and managing others?

Victoria: One of the main influences was a very strong head teacher...Erm who I worked with in the affluent school. This was a brand new school that was created and there were five of us that set up the school and it was her drive and passion and her knowing exactly what she wanted and what she believed that was right for the children in the school that she was working with which made me consider really, what type of leader I wanted to be and what kind of vision I would have, the types of passions, and she was incredibly creative. And she looked at the curriculum from a very different perspective, and although it kind of incorporated things that the national curriculum wanted, she was able to tailor that to the children in a very creative manner which is what I really liked. So everything wasn't standardised which is why I then chose to do a masters and I focused on my masters with the Creative Curriculum and became very passionate about the Creative Curriculum. And then as a deputy I influenced that being taught across the whole of the school. So there, they were very prescriptive about using QCA documents at the time..

Me: ...Right...

Victoria: ... everything was very kind of, this is what the government has said, this is what we're going to do and I didn't believe that it was right for the children at that time. So I still, as my previous head did, I still tried to take on board what the government were saying, that we had to cover, but actually looking at the children and do it that way. So that was quite influential in how I worked, that I didn't always feel that...I had to go with what everyone else was doing and I didn't always just follow the norm. I was always quite reflective about what I tried to do in the classroom, but then as a head teacher now, things have probably changed quite a lot in terms of policy and what the government are asking us to do. It is very difficult, and at times I've found that very hard as a practitioner because it's felt like it's gone against everything that I've previously believed in.

Me: Can you give an example of that, something that has been difficult?

Victoria: Erm...So even with the introduction of the grammar, punctuation and spelling test... I appreciate the importance of that within writing, but everything was then about another test and children having to perform and everything has become about levels, getting children to level 4C. And now it's all about getting children to Level 4B. Never quite feeling quite good enough. And I tried in my school again to have a creative timetable, yes with some structure with the literacy and numeracy. But I felt even with the introduction of that, it was like another half an hour taken off the timetable, because it was important to teach that discreetly as well to ensure that our children were performing in those particular things. And that's very difficult as a head because it's an area where last year we performed really poorly in... and obviously that's then highlighted on your Raise Online and it's then something you're questioned about from your local authority, you're questioned about by OFSTED. So whether you want to do something about it or not, you then had to...

Me: ...Right...

Victoria: ...So then, to my annoyance, grammar, spelling and punctuation then became part of my school improvement plan. And yes the children have done a lot better, and I'm not saying I don't agree with that being a stronger element within writing, but it's the way that's it done and it's the fact that I now feel that I have to work in a way that

I'd not initially intended for that to happen. So for me, what's now very difficult is that I'm very mindful of even things that have to be implemented by September...and whether or not I want to implement those things. It's now become a requirement and with the new Ofsted guidance and subsidiary guidance, you almost *know* the types of things you have to have in place within your school, and that then makes you work in a particular way. So even though I don't want to, to influence the way I am, and I do feel that I'm still a head teacher who is reflective and will actually say no to some things...

Thea, supply teacher

Me: Can you let me know how long you've been teaching for and just where you're at in terms of teaching and your career at the moment?

Thea: Yeah, I've been teaching for twenty years in July and I spent part of that time on supply. But I did start off permanently. I tend to do more supply nowadays, so I've done ten years of permanent and almost ten years of supply.

Me: And what do you think are the key aspects over the course of that time that have influenced your teaching?

Thea: Right, well first of all I'm a business teacher so I'm very much motivated by what happens in the media.

Me: Ok

Thea: And policies surrounding everything to do with business. That's my main subject but I do teach other subjects. Obviously I'm constrained by the National Curriculum when I'm teaching subjects other than my own.

Me: Right, How do you feel about the National Curriculum? Is it something you feel works for you or, do you have more freedom being a supply teacher?

Thea: Right, well I do find that the National Curriculum is much more restrictive than it was twenty years ago. When I'm in a permanent post, cause I do interspersed supply teaching with permanent posts, I do find that I do not have as much freedom to teach around the subject as I have done previously, and I find this dampens down the enthusiasm of the children in the classroom. Because obviously I have to cover a lot of things to make sure they're ready for their exams.

Me: Ok. In terms of it being more restrictive, are there any examples of where you've found it more restrictive in the curriculum, when you've wanted to do something different or differently?

Thea: Well for example, if I'm teaching business, as I say that's my subject, I used to teach an awful lot by teaching the students out, out of the classroom and in...

Me: ...ok...

Thea: ...and into industry. I found I had to stop that and just concentrate on the more theoretical aspects.... of business.

Me: How do you feel about that?

Thea: How do I feel about it? I'm not very happy about it. (laughter)

Me: Do you think it benefits the children more to know about the theory rather than taking them out?

Thea: Right, I suppose you could say that I teach back to front in that I'd rather take them out first than apply the theory later.

Me: Ok.

Thea: So... for my subject it works better like that, because in business, theory is sometimes quite heavy and quite dry...And, I'm also teaching from a text book for business, because we also have to go on, on the budget, every year. The annual budget will change things...and I like to use living, real life examples. So a book's out of...out of date if you like, as soon as it's printed for business.

Me: Yeah. And how do you feel this has formed your identity as a teacher?

Thea: Right, well my identity as a teacher I think has changed as I've gone through the sort of cycles, the sort of general life cycles, as a teacher. Now I think my identity has been shaped by... partly by what I was as a permanent teacher, because I've got that background, I come into it with a certain resistance if you like, to how I suppose quite a lot of supply teachers act. I mean I work directly for schools or for a particular schools. I negotiate my pay rate...

Harriet, part time teacher

Me: Can you give me a brief overview of your career and what your current position is in school?

Harriet: Ok, so... I went into teaching late, I didn't go into teaching straight after university, I did a few other things and then realised I wanted to "make a difference". So I qualified as a teacher when I was about 24 or 25. Then...I went to Manchester, did supply for a year. Then I did my NQT year at a very challenging school, in the centre of Manchester. And then...we moved to Devon and I have been working at another challenging school in different circumstances in Newton Abbott and I'm still there at the moment, but I'm part time after having two children.

Me: Having previously worked as a full time teacher do you think that the influences on your practice have changed after going part time?

Harriet: Yes. So, I think when you are a full time teacher you have a lot of control as to what you are doing and you have more flexibility in the time which you have with the children in school, also the time that you have outside of school is more flexible. But in many ways when I went part time I felt that I prioritised a little bit better. So even though I...had less time and less control if you like... I prioritised the things that were very important...

Me: ...Mhmm...

Harriet: ...The things that...I was under pressure for, like attainment in literacy and numeracy. And spent less time thinking about how to make learning enjoyable which is what I would have done if I was a full time teacher.

Me: So you said you prioritised things that were very important, were these things that were important to you or that you felt that were important from a higher level and put upon you?

Harriet: Definitely what had been put upon me, yes, from the head teacher. But I also know that that was directly from government because our school is in a challenging area had always been seen as not a good school because it wasn't achieving those things like the levels that other children are achieving in other areas. If you compare the two areas



it's ridiculous because, you're talking about children who come to school, who have never even picked up a book and don't know how to sit down and generally haven't been toilet trained and have no social skills. So at our school we spend a lot of time spending time with the children talking about how to be social before we even start on the learning. So you're already on a back foot every year as a result of that. And actually by the end of year 6 we know that our children have come a massive way, but because that isn't reflected in the national statistics, necessarily...that was at the time when I went part time, that was very much part of the pressure.

Me: So do you think that has affected your autonomy in the classroom?

Harriet: Absolutely, yeah, absolutely.

Me: Are there any examples you can give me of this, where you've felt that you have had to do something you didn't want to or...

Harriet: ...Felt that it wasn't necessary?

Me: ...Yes...

Harriet: ...Yes we have to test them every term, we have to analyse those tests, so we have to put them on, under that pressure, that we feel ourselves, so we get annoyed with the children if they're not behaving in the way that we are expecting...

Me: ...Mmm...

Harriet: ...but that's just for an exam, for a test that they have every term and it's just unnecessary and you have to mark those test papers, then you have to analyse those test papers. Err... and I understand to an extent why it's done, because you can see those children who are falling through the cracks. But at the same time is that really allowing the children to enjoy their learning experience? Because I don't think so.